

DISCLAIMER: That part of this world and those characters you've seen before belong to their Creator: JKR. The rest is mine - although I cannot quit my day job as I make no \$\$\$

A/N: This story, like it's predecessor, is rated T. I hope to keep it that way. If I upgrade, I hope it will be for violence (see last chappies of last bit for WHY) or language, although only the violence may be really necessary and even C.S. Lewis could get a little dark and graphic (Tolkien as well). I use them and a few others as guides. No R rated or worse stuff, safely teen. A little R on rare, rare occasions - and then only violence - safe.

"Adult Language and Content" ... okay, I get the "Content" bit, but Language? I could cuss like a sailor when I was six! (Wasn't one until about twelve or so years later.) Didn't learn it from parents but from classmates and the writing on the walls in the bathroom at school... Also had no idea what those words meant until sometime later. Just knew they were naughty and sounded cool. And you were supposedly to use them when you stubbed your toe or something. OW! \*\*\*\*\*! \*\*\*\*\*! \*\*\*\*\*! (However, that is not plot forwarding so... No \*\*\*\*'s that I can foresee. Okay, maybe an occasional "damn!" - or "Bloody" which is totally inoffensive here, but our cousins across the Pond say is right up there with \*\*\*\*\*!")

This story is the continuation of "30 Minutes That Changed Everything." It begins a few days after the last one ended. It is now August 1991 and our main characters are about to go to Hogwarts. The story should cover the period at least up to the outbreak of War (1995 at the earliest).

For those of you who have not read the first story, I will try to write this so that you are not totally lost. However, there are a lot of details from that story and arcs that will continue and will not be explained in nearly as much detail. For that, I apologize in advance.

For those who have followed along, this first chapter is a quickie summary of the 54 (½) Chapters and 370,000+ words of Book I, but does have more of Sensei's back story and his point of view as to what happened. I know I suggested Diagon Alley would be next, sorry. It's next to next. No, not EVERYTHING is in here. (Otherwise,

Chapter I would be at LEAST 50,000+ words and I'd leave myself with nothing to play with...)

## 30 MINUTES II: THE GATHERING STORM

### CHAPTER ONE: THE AVATAR

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4th, 1991 – POTTER HOUSE, LONDON, U.K.

He was born Harry James Potter on July 31st, 1981. However, now barely eleven years later, he was known by another name. Sensei's real age was hard to truly fathom even for him. Sensei was at least 172 years old, for he had seen at least that many "winters" or seasonal cycles. But the reality was that through manipulations in time, he was much, much older and had given up trying to figure out just how old he was long ago. Or at least that is what he remembered.

Sensei was not a physical being, although he clearly remembered being one once. He always found that intriguing. In reality, he had come into existence about 164 years from the present. His real experiences, the ones he could attribute to himself and not the memories of another, were only of the last three years or so. His first truly independent recollections were of his creation or activation a mere minutes before he was transferred from his original time to the first Saturday in May of 1988.

Sensei was an avatar. It was a word from the ancient Sanskrit that meant a being sent from another plane of existence to help or guide those in this one. In the West, the most analogous term might be an angel, but as that term was also associated with a divine deity, it did not truly apply to him. God did not create Sensei, Harry Potter did. Or at least a Harry Potter did, a Harry Potter that Sensei knew no longer existed.

Sensei's "being" was not human. To the few who could interact with him, he seemed human, looked human and probably acted human. However, there was nothing physical about him. A person could pass right through him without knowing he was even there. He could not pick up so much as a single grain of sand. Sensei was a purely magical entity. His Creator – the other Harry Potter – described him

as an amalgam of coherent magical energy designed to be stable and capable of projecting an image into the physical world. He was a hologram, an interactive pensieve, a compilation of data and memories, a magical binary representation and coalescence of the lifetime of knowledge, memories and experiences of his Creator. He could also be described as a “cheat.” Not in the sense that he was a cheater, rather that he was created to cheat the laws of physics, time and magic. He was created for time travel, and not just for time travel, but to change time itself.

The other Harry Potter was acutely aware of the dangers associated with time travel. Any alteration in the past course of events could have absolutely unpredictable and potentially disastrous consequences. Even in his time now some 157 years into the future, time travel was still only truly possible through magic, at least on the scale that was attempted. There was reason to believe that with enough energy, a subatomic particle might be sent backwards or forwards in time, maybe something a little larger. But to send something as massive as a human being required far more energy than was reasonably prudent or available. Wizards had learned how to manipulate time with magic some time ago. But even then, consequences aside, there were limitations.

The most common time manipulations were spells or magical fields that altered the forward progression of time. Sensei knew these quite well as both the other Harry Potter and the current Harry Potter had experienced that form of magic. Those fields would either slow the progression of time within them or speed them up. Time Compression sped up time inside the field so that someone within the field would experience days or weeks or more while real time advanced only hours. A modified form allowed one the advantages of extra time without incurring the cost – namely they would age at the normal time rate. This time buffer, however, only worked upon a person who was magically stable. Pregnant women and very young children were not stable, insofar as the buffer was concerned and would age at the accelerated rate until they became stable. (In the case of pregnant women, it was the unborn, unstable child that created the instability.) But, for a child over the age of five or six, they would not mature magically or physically at such an accelerated rate.

Travelling back in time was another matter. Some wizard had invented something called a time turner. Everyone knew it worked, but no one had really figured out how. The device was worn by the time traveler and could send him or her back hours, days, even a few weeks. But it could not send someone back decades or even centuries, which was the other Harry's conundrum. The events he wanted to change had happened at least a hundred years ago to him when he made the first attempts at changing them. He had invented something that could send a person back that far, at least on paper. He had sent two people back, and nothing happened. He never learned why. It was possible they were killed by the process or their memories erased. It was also possible they exercised their free will and did not do what they were sent back to do. There was no way to know for certain.

Sensei could only guess as to what happened, but he was fairly sure his guess was close to the truth. The other Harry had sent two very young assistants back, one after the other had clearly failed. Each knew what they were supposed to do and the consequences if they did it right. The world they knew would no longer exist. For them, the target date was long before they were born. If they succeeded, the events that led to the invention of the magical machine that sent them back would never occur, hence the machine would never be invented and they would never be sent back in time, thus they might no longer exist. They may also have known that the future they were sent to prevent might very well be the only one where their parents met. Thus to change that would mean they could never be born in the first place. Sensei believed that if they had in fact survived the time travel, each may have reached the conclusion that the safest thing to do was nothing.

The other Harry reached a similar conclusion. The other Harry knew that the best candidate for the mission was himself. He had lost so much over the years of the horrible timeline that he was not concerned with the consequences of changing it, even if he himself would never live to see the changes. The problem was, neither of his assistants could possibly continue his work without him, at least not for some time. He also did not see them as motivated as he was. The other Harry knew of a better time, they did not. They were born into a hell on earth. Harry was born before that hell had even begun and

knew it did not have to be that way. He also knew why and when it had all begun to fall apart.

When the two assistants had been sent back, the world was a very different place than the one Sensei now inhabited. Sensei was now in London, and it was the thriving city of the late twentieth century, bustling along as it had for centuries and unaware that within about eighty years it would be wiped from the face of the earth in a hail of thermonuclear warheads along with every other major population center on the planet. When the two assistants were sent back, they very well may have represented two-thirds of the entire human race that was alive at that time. They lived with the other Harry Potter in a cave in a far and remote corner of the world. It was a laboratory, library, living facility, a home of sorts. It had many names. At that time it was called The Redoubt. The assistants both knew that once their vast food supply ran out, that was it. They both knew that if the complex air filtration system ever broke down beyond repair, the lethal radiation would claim them as well. Not even magic had found a cure for that. But it was the only world they knew which may well have affected their ability to alter it.

The assistants had been the second try. The other Harry would have conceded it was an act of desperation. He had tried something similar over thirty years earlier a couple of years before the second to last war in history. It too had failed. He had tried in part because his assistants asked and in part because his other plan – a magical avatar – seemed like it would never amount to more than an idea. The other Harry had not been the genius who thought up the avatar. That had been his best friend and arguably the one true love of his life. Practically from the day they first met – which in that timeline was a little less than a month away – they had been close. She had always been there for him, even when everyone else had turned their backs. Yet they had never truly been more than friends. She died in 2055.

They both saw that the world was spinning out of control and that mankind was moving in a direction that made self destruction inevitable. They both saw this years before it became a reality. She saw the reason. Events only a few years in the current future, seemingly of minor importance at the time, started a chain of events

not unlike the lighting of a slow burning fuse: a fuse that at some point could not be extinguished. It was his idea to go back in time and stop it before it started. She knew all too well the dangers of time travel and to his surprise had agreed. Had it been solely to make their own lives better, and neither of their lives to that point had been what either would have wanted, she would never have agreed. But this was not about two lives, or even hundreds. This was about everything and that made it a worthwhile idea.

The other Harry was the one in the partnership who tended to think “outside of the box.” His Hermione was the one who could turn a hair brained idea into a reality. She was the theoretical engine and organizational genius. The other Harry came up with the idea for the Redoubt, his Hermione made it a reality. The other Harry came up with the idea for the temporal displacement chamber – the device that could send a person back decades. His Hermione made it into a reality. Together they made a Redoubt to work on their time experiments and which could survive what they knew was coming. Even they, however, did not truly know the full extent of the looming holocaust.

Sensei remembered The Day just as the other Harry would have. He was working in the Redoubt on the initial stages of the Avatar Project. His Hermione had travelled to London to download who knows how many terabytes of data from the electronic archives and to check on a shipment due to be sent through magical means to their Redoubt that week. The other Harry always worried about her and had devised a magical communications device that allowed him to talk to her whenever and wherever she was in the world, as well as to check on her safety. Suddenly, his device went dead. The other Harry knew what that meant but not why. His Hermione was gone.

He left immediately to find her or find out what had happened. Using magic, he tried to travel to London but could not get through. He wound up over forty miles away in an open field. Before him, the massive mushroom cloud was climbing into the stratosphere, the funeral pyre for over two million lives including the one that meant everything to him. It was not the only one, but it was the only one that mattered to him.

He later found himself on a lonely moor far to the north, far from those horrible clouds of smoke and flame. It was a place he and his Hermione had spent in a tent years and years ago during another dark time, but a time where there had been at least a glimmer of hope. It had been a good place to think back then which might be why he found himself there.

He had no idea how long he sat there. To be honest, that Harry had come to that place to think of her and await the end. It was more than a day or two, but as to how much more, he had no idea. It was just after dawn one day when he saw them. Ghosts, he first thought, for whoever had attacked Britain to destroy its wizards had done a very thorough job. Two small figures approached at what seemed to be a slow pace. It seemed to take them forever to arrive.

It was a boy and a girl. They were maybe four years old. He asked them where their parents were and they said that people like them had no parents. He asked them who they lived with and they said their "Masters." He asked them their names and they said "Boy" and "Girl." They were clearly magical children; a young witch and wizard. He knew about how far things had gone wrong and suspected they were "servants-in-training" to some Muggles, no better than slaves, a fate that was not uncommon in those dark times. He asked them what happened and they said there was a bright light and terrible fire and wind and then they were under the sky. That Harry suspected it had been accidental magic that brought them from the gates of hell to somewhere on the moor. He could tell they were not brother and sister, but they had lived with each other in a closet for as long as they could remember.

Something happened. That Harry was not about to let those two children pass away. He would try to change things if only for their sakes. He gathered the two dirty, scared and hungry children to him and took them with him back to the Redoubt. He became their mother, father, teacher and friend. They, in time, became his assistants. Secure in the Redoubt, they survived the last war. The surviving Muggles had made powerful machines designed to make sure the prior wars would never happen again. The machines worked, although not as designed, for they wiped out what was left of mankind about ten years after The Day. So far as that Harry knew only he and

the two children survived. The boy he named Neville and the girl he named Luna after two other friends who had died decades before in another senseless war. He could not bring himself to name the girl after his best friend.

It was Neville and Luna he sent back in time. Neville went first. The boy had been with that Harry for twenty-one years. He was sent back to July 1995 to a small town southwest of London. When the past clearly had not changed, Luna went back. Sensei thought about those two and wondered just how far gone that Harry was at the time. Then again, there was no real future for Neville and Luna in the Redoubt. While there was enough food to last the three of them more than a couple of lifetimes, they had already determined that the damage “up top” would mean it might be centuries before anything larger than a microbe could thrive outside the Redoubt. And yet they had gone back and the hell that was earth remained.

Sensei feared they might have met their end. So many things could have gone wrong. Any mistake could have been fatal. And even if the transport had not been a disaster, there were the magicals of that time – of this time – to consider. Time travel was illegal except without special permission. Time travel with the intent to alter the future was a capital offense. Had they been caught... But the other Harry and Sensei always believed they had made it back and somehow avoided that fate. They were a couple by then and Sensei believed they found each other in this past and made a life for themselves possibly in the hopes that the other Harry would be able to change the future by other means.

Maybe, Sensei thought, maybe one day he would see those two again.

Sensei was that other means. He was pure magic. As such he did not need air or food or anything else to sustain himself. The ambient magic all around did that. He knew everything the other Harry knew, which was far more than the assistants had known. He was also very non-human. The artificial intelligence the Muggles made to protect themselves and which ultimately destroyed them all was not that dissimilar to him, except he controlled no weapons. Like a computer, he was programmed and that programming suppressed human free



will. The assistants had that for better or worse. He had it to an extent. But his free will was limited. His mission trumped any other considerations. It was his reason for being and without it he was irrelevant.

The other Harry and his Hermione had traced the mistakes back to a single point in the past. Neither of them were pleased with the result. Everything came down to the interactions of three people, all wizards.

One was named Tom Riddle. He was evil personified and was consumed with a megalomaniacal need to rule the world; a world he hated. The rest of mankind was to have no will except that which he dictated. While he preached of a ruling elite, in reality he wanted a world of slaves with one master – him. He was so obsessed with his vision, he had delved into the deepest and darkest magics he could find to make his dream a reality. It would not do for such a ruler to be a mere mortal. Thus he had learned the ancient and very dark magic known as the horcrux. This was an enchanted object into which the evil wizard placed a fragment of his soul. So long as the object was intact and the soul fragment so encased, the remainder of that wizard's soul was anchored to this world. The body could die. It could be destroyed, but the soul would remain unable to pass on and so long as it remained, its owner could be restored to some semblance of life. Voldemort had made six of these objects.

The other was named Albus Dumbledore. He had been the other Harry's mentor in that time, and that Harry believed he was the personification of good. While perhaps not truly evil, that wizard was not good either. Whether the man consciously thought it or not, he had behaved as if he and only he knew what was best for the magical world. Only Dumbledore's vision mattered, although Sensei seriously doubted whether the man truly had a vision aside from that of a static, peaceful and unchanging society. The people within such a society, however, were merely tools to be used and when necessary disposed of to achieve such ends. Perhaps the only thing Dumbledore had been right to believe was that Voldemort had to be destroyed.

The other Harry, and by extension Sensei, had learned a thing or two about philosophy and theology over the decades. One thing was certain. No version of God was ever as arrogant or as certain of his

absolute right to control man as those two men. Perhaps the greatest mistake of fate in history was to allow two such men to live at the same time. And it came to pass that Dumbledore was not as all knowing and all wise and as correct in all things as he would have believed. His mistakes and oversights combined with Voldemort's determination to crush the world he hated led not to what either saw, rather it led directly to the end of all things.

In the middle of this madness was born a somewhat ordinary boy who would otherwise have stood out from others only because he was a wizard. True, he was ultimately more magically powerful than most, but not all powerful. Under other circumstances, he would probably have had a slightly more than ordinary life for a wizard, as he was smart and gifted that way, but otherwise would not have been what others made him out to be. A prophecy changed all of that. Like most all prophecies ever made, it meant nothing without context and no one could ever honestly know the true context, not even those who specialized in such things. Unfortunately for the boy, there were two men who believed in such folly and believed he was the key to everything.

The prophecy essentially presumed there would be a very powerful Dark Lord who would ultimately be defeated by a person born at a certain time to certain people. Voldemort presumed he was the Dark Lord in question. He had taken extraordinary measures to ensure he could never be defeated and never die and to learn that the fates said otherwise was a bit of a shock to say the least. Dumbledore knew the entire prophecy and believed that the person would have to die as well to see to it that the "Dark Lord" was removed from this world permanently. From the moment they each had learned of this prophecy, they each were looking for "The One" and both believed "The One" was one Harry Potter. Voldemort wanted the boy dead. Dumbledore wanted him to live if only to be molded into the ultimate weapon to destroy Voldemort. However, Dumbledore suspected Voldemort had made at least one horcrux and further suspected it was the boy. Thus, in the end the boy had to die if only to destroy the horcrux. Neither of them, obviously, cared a wit about what that boy might want. Then again, neither of them believed in free will, except their own of course.

The three lives clashed dramatically on Halloween 1981 when Harry was a little over a year old. Dumbledore had sent his parents into hiding before he was born, yet wanted to know who "The One" was as two boys fit the description, thus he set them both up. He changed the security arrangements on the Potter hiding place such that its location was now known to a traitor. On that night, Voldemort killed Harry's parents and then something happened. No one could ever say for sure what, but Dumbledore made it known that the baby Harry had somehow destroyed Voldemort. For Harry's safety, he was placed with his Aunt and Uncle. There could be no doubt that those two were the absolute worst possible choice for the boy. Left to their tender mercies, he grew up abused and a virtual slave at least until such time as the magical world came calling for him again. Dumbledore would be the caller, "rescuing" the boy from that fate and ensuring that Harry would be forever grateful and forever trying to make it up to Dumbledore, thus easily molded into the little martyr Dumbledore believe Harry needed to become for The Greater Good.

Harry was not nor had he ever been a horcrux. In the other Harry's timeline, the other Harry had believed that he had been one as well. He believed it because Dumbledore said it was so and Dumbledore was never wrong. But he was. There was another horcrux, one Dumbledore never learned about and the other Harry learned about too late. The other Harry destroyed Voldemort in 1998, only to see him return some decades later. The second return led to the bloodiest magical war in history, one which the muggles could not ignore. The other Harry finally destroyed that final horcrux and this time it was another who killed Voldemort for good, something Dumbledore would not have believed possible. The problem was, it was now too late. The muggles (the non-magical world, as in most everyone) saw the magicals as a threat and the third war, the one that destroyed London and over a billion lives followed.

The easiest way to set things to right would have been to destroy Voldemort early, certainly before he made his first horcrux, ideally when he was still Tom Riddle and preferably before the Muggle raised Tom Riddle ever learned that magic was real. Short of that, preventing the prophecy from being uttered might work as well as Dumbledore would not be fixated on the import of some boy and might devote his intellect to actually destroying Voldemort himself.

The problem was that time magic did not seem to allow a person in control of such magic to send anything or anyone back to a date before he was born. The other Harry could send his assistants back to before they were born, but not to before he was.

This strange restriction had caused both the other Harry and Sensei some concern. But the other Harry pressed forward within those restrictions. Harry Potter was the key person, the one thing that could be changed that might change all things. Change the boy's life, break him free from both Dumbledore and Voldemort and things would be very different. Neither the other Harry nor Sensei could know how, but anything was better than what had happened.

The plan was simple enough. The other Harry picked a point in his life where the sequence of events need only change a little to have a massive impact years in the future. The target date was late June or early July 1995. Harry Potter would be fourteen then having finished his Fourth Year of magical school. The target location was the town of Little Whinging, Surrey, southwest of London where Harry lived with his Aunt and Uncle. The boy's home life should have landed his care givers in prison long before then, but that had not happened. The avatar was activated, the machine set and it was agreed that if they erred in targeting, they would err in favor of overshooting the planned arrival date.

That is indeed what had happened. Sensei arrived not in the summer of 1994, but in early May 1988 when Harry was seven years old. It was the Saturday after the worst beating the boy had received in his life, a beating that well could have killed him. Sensei found the boy at the local library reading, knowing that at that age the boy went there quite often as it was a refuge from the hell in which he lived.

Sensei knew that Harry Potter could see and hear him. While most of the time Sensei existed as a microscopic point of concentrated magical energy, he could project himself into an exact replica of the other Harry, the 168 year old one. True, he had no physical substance, but so long as no one tried to test that point, he appeared as real as anyone provided that the viewer was part of his programming. Harry was. Harry would always be able to see and hear Sensei.

The seven year old Harry Potter knew nothing about magic, aside from the magic he read about in books. That magic was fiction, a point his Uncle made very loudly all the time for no apparent reason whatsoever and usually punctuated with a beating. Thus, when an old man asked to join Harry at a table in the library, that Harry could not know that the old man was a magical projection. Sensei managed to get the boy to talk to him. It was a simple experiment on Sensei's part wondering whether the boy would respond and knowing the boy's fate in the other timeline later that day. In that timeline, the boy passed out not long after getting back to the Dursleys. If he could delay the boy, maybe this time would be different.

Sensei succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. All he did was talk to the boy for about an hour or so, delaying the boy's departure by about thirty minutes. The boy passed out in the middle of the street right in front of the library and right in front of a family from Essex on a weekend drive. Instead of laying on a floor for days in delirium, the boy was transported to a hospital. The authorities immediately knew abuse when they saw it. He was removed from the Dursley's care that day, even though they had no idea who the boy was or who his family was and even though the Dursley's had left the country on holiday, perhaps in the hopes that the boy they considered the bane of their existence might conveniently die while they were away.

But then, things really began to change. The family who had seen Harry pass out and saw to it he was sent to the hospital were the Grangers. It was a family of three. The daughter's name was Hermione Granger. In the other time line, this was the same Hermione the other Harry was not destined to meet until September 1st 1991 and the Hermione who became his best friend and the love of his life. This was the Hermione who died in London when London was destroyed. The Grangers became Harry's new family weeks before he even left the hospital.

The Dursley's, on the other hand, died in a house fire shortly after their return (and arrest), a house fire the other Harry had prevented in the other time line. This changed even more events. The magical world thought Harry Potter died there as well. The famous Harry

Potter was no more and now an anonymous Harry Potter was recovering in the Muggle hospital.

Then Sensei learned something he had never known before. He had always believed Hermione was a Muggle Born. He was certain she was and was certain she died believing she was. She was not. She was the daughter of Erin Ryan and David Puckle, not Robert and Rose Granger. Her birth parents were sixteen and students at Hogwarts when Hermione was born in a Time Compression Chamber reserved for under age witches who became pregnant, an unfortunately common occurrence at that school for a variety of reasons none of which made any real sense. Ordinarily, the birth parents would have all memories of the pregnancy and child erased as soon as the child was born. The child would be adopted by a Muggle couple in almost all cases and raised and classified as a Muggle Born, while their parents would live their lives ignorant of their son or daughter's existence. Except in this case, for Erin Ryan was the granddaughter of the Deputy Headmistress, Minerva McGonagall, who for reasons of family heritage ignored the law at least in regards to memories. Erin and David would be allowed to be a part of Hermione's life if not as "parents" then as godparents. One day, Hermione would be told the truth.

That day never came in the other time line. In both times, Erin and David did marry, but were murdered by Voldemort's followers around the time of Hermione's second birthday. The Grangers planned to tell her when she was eighteen, but when she was seventeen and another war was raging, Hermione altered her "parents" memories and sent them off into hiding. Hermione was a brilliant young witch, but memory magic is tricky at best and to try to alter over seventeen years worth of memories as one's first memory charm was rash. It is one thing to make a person forget what they just ate for breakfast and then find they are unable to reverse the Charm completely, this was a typical first time problem for memory magic trainees, but a whole lifetime as one's first attempt was another matter. Hermione was able to restore most of her parents' memories, but the memories of her true origins were lost and, because Hermione never knew that, there was no way she knew they were missing. One could only guess why Minerva never told her in that timeline, although a fair argument could be made that Hermione was quite happy being who she was.

When the other Harry was about twenty, he finally went to Gringotts to look into his inheritance. His parents' will stunned him. It left the Potter estate to Harry James Potter, born July 31st 1980 in Godric's Hollow and Clarice Lillian Potter, born July 12th 1981 in Godric's Hollow. He had a "baby" sister! Naturally, he tried to find her. It took years. Clarice had been adopted by a Muggle couple in November 1981 named Jameson, yet when she was admitted to magical school at age eleven in 1992, the school records indicated she was in foster care. The records classified her as a Muggle Born. Clarice Jameson attended St. George's Academy of Magic in London and was apparently a good student. But there was no record of her finishing or sitting for her N.E.W.T.s.

Deep in the Archives of the Ministry of Magic, Harry learned why. On October 15th, 1997, not long after starting her sixth year, she was convicted of "Stealing Magic" by the "Muggle Born Registration Committee and sent to Camp Salazar. It was not possible to steal magic, but the policy of the new Voldemort government was that all Muggle Borns were abominations. She was processed in as "Detainee 2107" on October 21st, 1997 and detailed for "Magical Experiments" on March 3rd 1997. Her file "Closed" three days later, meaning she was one of thousands who died in the Camp before that War ended.

In this new timeline, even that changed rapidly. A couple of weeks after Harry arrived and about a week after he met Hermione and they became instant best friends, a girl was brought into his room one day. It was Clarice. Her adoptive father had died about a year earlier, probably from cancer. She and her mother had been driving to her school in London a few days before when their car was broadsided by a Lorry. Her mother died and she wound up injured, scared and very, very alone in a hospital. Somehow, they discovered she and Harry were actually brother and sister and reunited. When Harry finally left the hospital, he left to live with the Grangers, his best friend and his long lost sister.

Sensei was struck with the amount of import luck or fortune or whatever one might call it played in the events following his brief meeting with the Harry of this time in that Library. Only fortunate

circumstance explained why it was the Grangers, Hermione and her family, who found Harry that day. The Grangers lived about two hours away in Loughton, Essex when motorway traffic was taken into account. Only luck could explain his reunion with his little sister. And, perhaps it was as much luck as design which explained how quickly Sensei could interact with others not named Harry Potter. His design protocols were such that supposedly only those who were trusted implicitly in both timelines would be able to see Sensei and interact with him. This did not explain Clarice or Hermione's parents and, while Minerva McGonagall was trusted and never betrayed said trust in the Other Harry's time, she could see Sensei immediately. At the time, Sensei feared the boy was too trusting, a problem the other Harry had to his detriment and harm. But time had proven this was not truly the case. These people would stand by this Harry through anything and against anyone. And it opened up opportunities for change Sensei and the other Harry never truly envisioned.

In the other time, the closest man to a father to Harry was Sirius Black, his godfather and a man he only knew for two years. Sirius in both times was framed for the murder of Harry's parents and imprisoned without trial. Even the most vile of Death Eaters got a trial. In the Other Time, Sirius languished in prison until 1993 when he escaped, but he remained a fugitive until his death in battle against Death Eaters in 1996. Days after the current Harry met Minerva, who to this day he called "Aunt Minnie," and armed with information from Sensei, Minerva uncovered the true criminal: Peter Pettigrew. Sirius was out of Azkaban days later and exonerated. In the few years since, he married Sophie Tomkins, who was a Healer-in-Training while he spent close to two months recovering from the effects of that prison and now had an almost one year old daughter Emily and Sophie was expecting again. The other Sirius never had that.

The scandals that erupted from the events following Harry's escape from the Dursleys shook the wizarding world to its core, but proved a boon to Harry and his new and growing circle of family and friends. By reuniting with Clarice, the Blood Wards Dumbledore cast upon Harry as a baby hit full strength and The-Boy-Who-Lived passed from memory of all but those he let into his life. The-Boy-Who-Was-Abused, however, was another matter. Between the attempted murder of a magical child by their Muggle caretakers and the flagrant



abuse of law and justice in the case of Sirius Black, it was a miracle (or thousands of Galleons and called political favors) that Dumbledore kept any of his lofty positions. He kept them, but he lost any credibility in the magical community.

The abuse scandal was initially a murder investigation, one which would reunite Harry with a long lost Uncle (his mother's half brother), introduce him to more magical children (his cousins, the Greengrass sisters and others) and in a way provide him with a government that would act in his best interest. His Uncle was a Muggle who married a witch and had eight magical children. He also worked for MI-5, an organization tasked with the internal security of Muggle Britain and specifically Office W, the division that dealt with MAGICAL security. It turned out the Muggle probably knew far more about the magical world than the Magicals knew about the Muggles. Office W also employed magicals. Soon, its rolls would include Remus Lupin. Lupin was another friend of the Potter family who, in the Other Time, was mostly unemployed due to the fact he was a Werewolf and magicals did not consider him either safe or human. Not so the Muggles, apparently. He was hired by Office W within days of meeting two of its Agents who had decided to meet Harry. He was hired BECAUSE he was a Werewolf. Once Sirius recovered (and returned from his honeymoon) the former Auror also joined MI-5.

By September 1988, Harry, Hermione and Clarice had also befriended two others who, like they had been, had been lonely and friendless: Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood. Neville had been believed a Squib, a non-magical born to magical parents, and had been kept out of society by his Gran for that reason. His parents were supposedly insane following a Death Eater attack, so in a way he was an orphan just like Harry, Hermione and Clarice. Luna had but one friend in her life - Ginny Weasley - but Dumbledore had put a stop to that in order to begin grooming Ginny as a future mate for Harry. That plot died the day the new Blood Wards formed, but Luna was still friendless. She met Harry, Hermione and Clarice on her eighth birthday and, along with Neville, they were fast and close friends.

The results of which in the next couple of years were astounding in many ways. In the other timeline, Luna's Mum died in a magical accident and she saw her Mum pass. In this timeline, Luna's new

friends were there soon after it happened and Jasmine Lovegood, while seriously injured, survived. Clarice was by then a fully trained healer and while Harry, Hermione, Luna and Neville got Jasmine out of the burning lab that should have claimed her life, Clarice saved her life as Jasmine was critically injured. But not even Sensei saw the further outcome. It turned out Jasmine was pregnant with twins. Harry Theodore Neville Lovegood and Hermione Sophia Clarice Lovegood were born seven months later, quite healthy and, as Luna would say, quite noisy.

Having arrived years before scheduled, Sensei had originally planned to teach Harry what he could at least until Harry was old enough to attend Hogwarts. Even that plan fell quickly to the wayside. Within weeks of leaving the hospital, Harry, Hermione and Clarice were enrolled in the Summer Sessions at the Watanabe School of Magical Studies in Kyoto Japan. Sensei had mentioned this to the kids and Grangers and Minerva, but did not really think anything would come of it. He could not have been more wrong. Minerva had seen to it immediately after claiming her rightful place under the Will of James and Lily Potter as Harry and Clarice's magical guardian (she was already Hermione's.) That school admitted children as early as age six. It taught magic banned in Britain (banned for a host of reasons, few if any of which made any sense.) It also operated under Time Compression for the Summer International Sessions.

They spent thirty days there each summer for the last four summers, at least it was thirty days for anyone not on that campus. For them, it was 1500 days with five 300 day Sessions, each session being equivalent to one academic year. The school taught "Mind, Body and Magic." In addition to magic, they also took non-magical courses. They had just completed their fourth summer. They now each had completed all the formal magical education offered anywhere in Britain, as well as attaining at least three advanced magical Masteries each, the equivalent of magical college degrees. They also had their non-magical college degrees as well up through and including their doctoral degrees. Hermione had her Ph.D. in Political Science and Magical Masteries in Defense, Transfiguration and Spell Crafting (a six "year" course of study. Most Masteries were three "years".) Clarice had her Ph.D in Economics and Masteries in Defense, Charms and a Basic and Advanced Mastery in Healing. Harry had his

Ph.D. in Chemistry and Masteries in Defense, Curse Breaking, Warding and, to Sensei's great amusement, Potions. (The other Harry hated potions, but that may have been due to his teacher at Hogwarts.)

That school resulted also in the removal of the Voldemort soul fragment from Harry. He was not, as Dumbledore had believed, another horcrux, but the unstable and dormant fragment was a threat. The kids also learned ancient magics that allowed them to destroy two true horcruxes already, thwart the Blood Ritual Voldemort used in the last timeline to return in 1995 (as all the bones of his ancestors were now ashes) and restore Neville's parents to their right minds.

But what had happened when Harry, Hermione and Clarice first returned from Japan in August of 1988 stunned even the aged Sensei. They had learned wandless and mind magics, both of which could be passed on to young people without being discovered by the Ministry for Magic. Their friends told their friends who told their friends. In the summer of 1989, ten more children traveled from Britain to Japan for their educations. A year later, thanks to funding both from a Foundation the Potter Family had established years ago and from the Muggle Government, another 444 joined them in Japan. This past summer, a total of 927 children and young people ranging in age from seven to twenty and from all of the six magical schools in the British Isles had gone. All, technically, in violation of the British Magical Law and custom. And yet this education revolt had hundreds of adults in support including at least two senior Department Heads within the Ministry of Magic, a few members of the Wizengamot and faculty members from all six schools.

That thirty minute delay Sensei had engineered was now far beyond what he and the other Harry had expected. The primary mission was on track. Voldemort would not come back a second time if things continued apace and with Sensei's knowledge, they would. But the other Harry never thought beyond that, probably hoping that the rest would sort itself out. Sensei now saw that destroying Voldemort without more was a good move, but would only delay the hell. So long as Magical Britain remained the Pureblood dominated, insular society that it was, sooner or later another Dark Lord would arise and present the same threat not just to the magicals, but to mankind itself.

Now, however, there were the first stirrings of real revolution. All the few revolutions that really took hold and survived the chaos of change began not unlike this. Adults were whispering in coffee shops and taverns and speaking aloud in parlors. And here, children were learning more than their adults had and were, probably almost to a person, not about to go back to the past nor deny their children the opportunities they had.

Thirty minutes had changed everything. Sooner or later, Magical Britain was in for a very rude shock and even now, Sensei thought, the Oligarchs were dead. They just didn't know it yet.

Dumbledore wanted a malleable pawn in Harry Potter. He was about to find a lion.

The wizarding government wanted everything to remain the same "as it always had been." They were about to find themselves facing an irresistible force they could neither control nor defeat if they tried.

Voldemort wanted his Death Eaters to take over this world. He had counted upon passive acceptance and magical inability on the part of the populace and Dumbledore's deluded belief that war does not mean killing. Sensei now knew Voldemort's time was short. This Harry was trained in Combat Defense. This Harry and hundreds like him knew that sometimes killing was necessary. And this Harry and hundreds like him knew how to kill. None of them had killed. In Muggle parlance, they were all "green" and had yet "to see the Elephant." But they knew that war was different and war meant killing the enemy. This time, maybe, being a Death Eater would not be a path to long life.

As Sensei watched his young charge, he knew his mission was now secondary. He would continue to guide Harry towards the final and total defeat of Voldemort. But that was not the end, it was only the beginning. And the beginning of the beginning was about to come to pass.

## CHAPTER TWO: DIAGON ALLEY

MONDAY, AUGUST 5th, 1991 – POTTER HOUSE, LONDON, U.K.

“You up Harry?” a voice called into the room of Harry Potter. He was in his private bathroom finishing his shower.

“Towel off,” he called out. He had gotten up earlier than normal. This was not because he was excited, rather he knew today would be a busy day for him and the others. They were going to Diagon Alley, the largest magical shopping district in Britain. He had been there before. He always went several times a year to shop for birthday and Christmas presents, or at least always after leaving the Dursleys forever. However, to be honest, he preferred the wonderful shopping district in Kyoto, Japan where he had gone to school. The Japanese - most of the magical world in fact - did not “ban” nearly as many things as his own countrymen. Harry had already bought presents in Japan, but he knew he should probably buy some more.

Today should have been a big day for Harry Potter and his family. Under other circumstances, this was the day he was to get his first wand, along with all of the other supplies he needed for his first year at a magical school. However, Harry and his friends were not normal by wizarding standards. He already had two wands. He had purchased his first wand in Japan a little over three years ago when he really started magical school. That same summer, for his sister's birthday, a lot of them went to climb Fujiyama, the iconic mountain in Japan. There was a path that anyone could walk to the summit, provided the altitude did not get to them. Everyone could buy a walking stick carved from oak or a similar hardwood at the beginning of the trail, even the Muggles. However for magicals such as Harry and his friends, their walking sticks had a magical core. At various points along the trail there were shrines to various Shinto gods and such and at those shrines it was custom to have the walking stick branded. The last such shrine was at the summit and getting all of the brands meant one had climbed Fujiyama. For magicals, however, these brands activated and transformed their walking sticks into magical staves.

In Japan they had learned far more magic and far more types of magic than were taught in Britain. The British Magical Government barred such magics in the schools for one very simple reason: they could not control them. In Japan, every student learned to project magic - as in cast spell - both with a wand and without. Starting in Fifth Year, they began learning to use magical staves as well. Britain did not teach wandless magic because it could not be easily detected or controlled. All British wands were registered and tied into a magical detection system such that the government could detect such magic and if the magic used was "forbidden" for whatever reason, they could find the person who did it. Staves were not allowed either because they could be used to make wards and curses that could not be undone with a mere wand. With a staff, a person could make their home nigh on impregnable to wand users, thus they could avoid the controls of their government.

Harry knew just how stunted the British Magical Education was. In Britain, magical education began at age eleven. From the first day, students learned with wands exclusive of any other kind of magic. They were taught precise wand movements and precise verbal incantations for scores if not hundreds of spells. All of which, in reality, was quite unnecessary. True, that method of instruction was easier and the children did achieve results more quickly than had Harry and the others under another system. But the method had a side effect. The children became dependent upon their wands. So much so that unless they began to learn other magic on their own at a young age, by the time they were adults and "fully qualified," they would be incapable of casting any spell without a wand. In effect, they could be rendered powerless simply by taking their wands. A perfect system if one envisioned a system designed to control a population.

The truth was that any young witch or wizards could learn wandless magic. It was an innate talent they were all born with. Every magical child's first magical event or events was a form of uncontrolled wandless magic. Control could be taught even at a fairly young age and one did not need the crutch of a wand to teach it. Clarice had begun magical school less than two weeks shy of her seventh birthday. Harry was barely eight. They had both learned wandless magic with ease. This was in part because their first month or two of school was entirely about mind exercises, the beginning of mind

magics. The control of one's mind that led to skills in occlumency also taught the student the skills necessary to master wandless magic as well as learn to use a wand without the intricate and predictable wand movements or slow, verbalized incantations.

The three types of spell casting magic were similar, yet each had its own magical advantages and disadvantages. Wandless magic was by far the most flexible as one merely had to desire a result and cast for effect. However, it required the greatest degree of mental focus and discipline. It also lacked the precision, delicacy and concentrated magical energy that one could attain with a wand. Wands were not as flexible, although they neared that point if the user was skilled at wandless casting. In combat, the ideal situation was one adept at both. Their defensive spells would be wandless. Shields, blockers and distraction magics did not require the same focused power and precision as an attack. While attacks could be done wandlessly, wands were better. Primitive muggles could throw a pointed stick by hand and do some damage. Use a bow or a spear thrower, and the pointed stick became deadly. The situation was somewhat similar between wandless and wand attacks. The wand was both more accurate and delivered comparatively more concentrated magic energy to the target than a wandless attack.

The "eastern" or "freeform" style of magical combat differed greatly from what was common in Britain. British magical combat was not unlike fencing where the combatant thrust or attacked with a spell then parried or blocked the counter attack. The "eastern" style, which was more global than eastern, the combatants defended continuously without a wand while attacking rapidly with one. As their training did not require the complex wand movements or incantations that British duelists trained in the "classical" style used, they could maintain a much higher rate of fire. The O.W.L. standard in Defense was a continual magical shield with simultaneous attack spells at a rate of three spells every two seconds for fifteen seconds. Power was not a consideration as power levels differed with age. A young person such as Harry could not hope to equal the raw magical power of even a below average yet fully mature adult. Still, the style he had learned could be advantageous. It was not unlike the British "fencer" facing an armored knight with a machine gun – a weak one to be sure, but

even a hail of pellets could at least deter or prevent a successful attack.

Harry had no illusions. Physically and magically, he was still a child – highly trained and skilled, but still a child. Almost any magical adult could overpower him if he gave them a chance. His weapons were not raw power, but speed, agility and skill. In Japan, like all upper level Defense Students, he had dueled against adult instructors. When they fought in the “eastern” “freeform” style, Harry’s few successes were when his opponent made a mistake. When they fought in the “western” “classical” “fencing” style, the adult’s successes usually occurred when Harry made a mistake. And Harry knew that there were now over four hundred and fifty “children” like him in Britain, all of whom had Defense Masteries from Japan.

If there was a general weakness to normal wand or wandless spell casting, it was that the source of the magical energy itself was the caster’s own magical core or center. That was not unlike a battery in that it could be run down if overused. A stave, however, could even the odds. With a stave, one was merely a conduit for magical energy and not the source. The source was the ambient magical energy all around, which was comparatively limitless and certainly could not be run down. As one was not relying on one’s own magic for power, the stave made the magic user much more powerful than any other form of “expressive” magic projection. But it too had limitations. The stave was not unlike the plug on an electrical appliance. It tapped into the comparatively limitless energy of a massive energy grid, but it had to stay tapped in at all times. A stave would not work unless it was in continual contact with the ground. Picking up a stave was not unlike pulling a plug. Thus, while a stave user was a much more powerful opponent, he also could not move. This placed him at a severe tactical disadvantage.

Harry held four magical Masteries. In addition to Combat Defense and Potions, both of which had but limited uses, if any, for staves, he was also a Curse Breaker and Warder. Those were two branches of magic where staves were incredibly useful. Any curse created by any wand could be broken by a stave. The same was true for wand based and even ward stone based wards. A stave could overpower them.



Likewise, even the most powerful wand user would be hard pressed at best to break stave-based wards or curses.

Harry liked to think that anyone could learn such magics, but he knew the ability diminished with age. When Harry began his second summer in Japan, ten new students joined Hermione, Clarice and him. Three were their age and the remainder were older. The oldest three had taken their O.W.L.s and completed their sixth year. Those three had learned the skills, but that was after a year of mind magic and wandless exercises. They would say that without that year, they would have never made it through their first summer in Japan. Harry would have liked to respectfully disagree on this point, but to date those three were by far the oldest to start at the Japanese school. The following summer saw over four hundred new students from Britain, not one of whom was beyond their third year in Britain. That group too had a year of training behind them and as a group did not struggle to the same extent as the older students had. Thus, there was some verifiable basis for the theory that over dependence on wand magic, coupled with approaching magical maturity made learning the ancient arts difficult and eventually near impossible. The obvious conclusion was that the British system made its magic users entirely dependent upon wands; wands that were supposedly registered with their government, wands that could be monitored by their government, and wands that could be taken away.

The funny thing was there really were not any laws that prohibited learning wandless magic or mind magics. They were not taught in the British schools and the books on those topics that Harry had seen in the local bookstores were not particularly useful, but it was not illegal. Ask an adult witch or wizard – especially one who did not know about the British contingent from the Japanese school – and they would say it had always been this way and that everyone knew those magics were nigh on impossible to learn which was why they were not taught. Harry smirked at this knowing there were now nine hundred and twenty-seven young British witches and wizards who were living proof that such a notion was little more than fantasy, and perhaps wishful thinking on the part of the British Magical Government.

Still, even though such magics were not illegal per se, Harry tended to agree that it was not prudent to rub the control freaks' noses in it ...

yet. When magical school resumed again in a few weeks, about a quarter of the students would be both far too advanced for their years and adept at magics that were supposedly too difficult to learn. But this little “protest” had remained a secret now for two years and the hopes were it would remain one for at least a while longer. Keeping it a secret was almost a full time job for several people, including Harry, Hermione and Clarice who were intimately aware of the security measures in place at all six magical schools in Britain, even though none of them had ever been to any of the schools. Now that they were slated to begin such a school themselves, Harry wondered how long it would last.

But that was a problem for another day, he thought as he headed down for his breakfast. Today he, Hermione and Clarice would begin their “undercover” life. They were going to Diagon Alley to buy school supplies they really didn’t need to attend a school that for them was, at least from an educational standpoint, entirely unnecessary. There were indeed reasons for them to go to Hogwarts. But those reasons had nothing to do with their formal education. What could Hogwarts possibly teach three people who were already better educated than many of that school’s staff?

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“Morning Harry,” a few voices called out as he entered the “informal” dining room just off the kitchen. It seemed that he was the last to arrive as all of the current residents of Potter House were already sitting down to their breakfasts. There were the Grangers, his sister Clarice and his best friend Hermione. Remus Lupin and his godfather Sirius Black were clearly just finishing up and Sirius’s wife Sophie was busy with their soon-to-be one-year-old daughter. The Longbottoms were there as well.

Neville and his Gran had moved into Potter House “temporarily” almost a year earlier just before Neville and Luna Lovegood rescued his parents from St. Mungo’s. Neville’s parents had been wasting away in the Long Term Care Ward since November of 1981 following a Death Eater attack on their home. Most people believed they had suffered permanent insanity due to overexposure to the Cruciatus or Torture Curse. It was Hermione and Clarice who found out that was not what happened at all. The two had been hit by an almost

unknown Curse recorded only in the Journals of the Black Family. That Curse had almost literally imprisoned Frank and Alice Longbottom in their own minds. Neville and the others brought them here and freed them from their prison.

The reason they moved from their Manor to the Potters was that the group suspected that the man behind the attack would try and prevent any attempts at a cure. Unfortunately, they were right as Albus Dumbledore saw to it that the Aurors made finding the missing Longbottom's a priority. While he had forgotten why their hospital stay was so important, he had not forgotten that he once believed they were there for a reason. Unfortunately, that reason was already public knowledge thanks to the Child Abuse Investigation that nearly cost Dumbledore his many positions in society. Some months ago, Dumbledore finally remembered the why and realized, belatedly, that his need to find the Longbottoms no longer had any import. Still, the man was reluctant to let anything go. To suddenly call off what had been a major investigation without much of an explanation might cause more harm than allowing it to continue; at least more harm to the already tarnished reputation of one Albus Dumbledore. However, he was subtly reminded that to continue the investigation without explanation might result in another very public inquiry, particularly considering the cost in both time and money which had already been expended. The Longbottom matter was quietly dropped.

And yet the Longbottoms had remained at Potter House. This was in part because Neville was so close to the children who called this place home. But it was also because his parents were still recovering from at least the physical effects of their long incapacity. They had stayed in London until it was time for Neville to travel to Japan for his third summer of school. Frank and Alice joined him there as Minders: adults who lived in the dormitories to supervise the students. The Japan trip gave them four years and forty days of recovery in one month. They were once again hale. And one might argue that their eyes were now open to all of the ills in their world they had once either not noticed or ignored. Still, they remained at Potter House after returning from Japan, although they were planning to move back to Longbottom Manor once Neville left for Hogwarts.

Today, however, they would be escorting the four children of Potter House to Diagon Alley. The task fell to them as it would look odd for such children to be wandering about without adult supervision and, as it was a Monday, they were the only adults who had the time. Prior to their incapacity, they had been Aurors whose job was to hunt down Death Eaters and other “Dark” witches and wizards. Since their “escape” they remained unemployed and now were the only such younger adults in Potter House. The Grangers had two dental practices: one in the Muggle World and one in the Magical. Sirius and Remus were both Agents with Office W of MI-5. Sophie had been a Healer at St. Mungo’s but had left that position for a job with the magical health clinic the Muggles had set up for their magical employees. The pay was comparable, but the hours were better, and with an infant to care for, she could not work the twelve hour shifts. As the Longbottoms were the only ones without other places to be, today would be their first trip into Diagon Alley since before they went into hiding almost twelve years ago.

“So,” Sirius said, “the Weasleys going to be there today?”

“I think so,” Harry said. “We talked about meeting up today.”

“Excellent! We have something for them!” Sirius then handed Harry a polished, wooden box. Harry gave him a confused look. “Go on, open it.” Sirius said.

Harry did and saw a folded piece of blank parchment inside.

“Is this,” he began.

“Marauder’s Map, 1991 version,” Sirius said. The map was the creation of Remus, Sirius and their long-dead best friend, Harry’s father. It was an enchanted map of Hogwarts that was blank unless one knew the command to activate it. Once activated, it showed a map of the school with every secret passageway or room the Marauders had ever found. It also showed the exact location of every person in the school or on the grounds at any time. This feature had the added advantage that it could not be fooled by any known deception magic. Invisibility, potions, transfiguration, even the art of animagus transformation where a wizard turns into an animal, would

not trick the map at all. It would always show the user the person in question even if that person was otherwise invisible or unrecognizable. It was a useful tool to those who liked to sneak about at nights and set up elaborate pranks.

“1991 version?” Harry asked.

“New and improved!” Sirius beamed. “First off there’s the box. Should some overly zealous faculty member ever confiscate the map, the box automatically will generate its replacement. Second, this map can be keyed into the users. Anyone else even try and touch it and it will automatically wipe itself clean. No more cancellation charm. Third, if you or they find something not on this map, it will automatically update with your discovery and update every other map.”

“Other maps?”

“Of course, Harry my boy! You didn’t think we would give the Weasleys exclusive rights, did you?”

“Er...”

“We got others. You’ll be getting one, as will Hermione, Clarice and maybe Neville and Luna as well. We can make others as well. In fact, that’s the brilliant thing about these new maps. We can make copies quite easily.”

“You will need them,” Remus added, “given your – er – extra activities this year.”

“Thanks.”

“Just what do those things do?” Alice Longbottom asked. It was clear that other adults were interested. Sirius explained the maps' unique features. “That explains a lot,” Alice said.

“Oh?” Harry asked.

“Your father and his friends were known prank masters. The staff and Prefects set up patrols at night just to catch them and they were never caught.”

“We were on occasion,” Remus said.

“When we wanted to be,” Sirius added. “Sometimes it was useful as a diversion.”

Alice and Frank Longbottom stepped through the huge fireplace burning with a magical, green fire. It was what was called a Floo; a magical transportation system that connected one magical fireplace to another. It was perhaps the easiest way to move from one place to another with magic. Even Muggles could use it if they knew how. It also doubled as a form of communications system, however as former Aurors, the Longbottoms knew it was hardly a secure communications system as the Ministry of Magic could tap into it at any time. Worse, anyone with a knowledge of how the system worked could also do so to some extent. Still, things were quiet these days, so it was relatively safe.

The kids had actually suggested using the Muggle underground or walking. Potter House was located across the road on the southern side of Hyde Park in London and their destination was a magical tavern located a block from the Charing Cross Road Underground Station. While the kids seemed perfectly comfortable with using Muggle mass transit, the older Longbottoms were not, so they used the magical equivalent.

The kids had gone on ahead of them, but that was only a matter of seconds. The two Longbottoms stepped from the fireplace into the tavern.

“It hasn’t changed,” Alice noted to her husband.

“Tom looks older,” Frank replied noting the bartender and proprietor.

“It has been twelve years, Dear,” Alice said. “We look older as well.”

They both saw that five children were awaiting their arrival. In addition to the four who currently considered Potter House their home, the fifth was their friend who seemed to be with them more often than not. She was blonde haired with pale, blue eyes and looked as ordinary as any other girl of ten or eleven, which was her age when measured from her date of birth. Luna Lovegood was about two months younger than their Neville. However, like Neville, Luna had also spent three summers in Japan. Her real age as measured in days of experience and learning was about the same as Neville's. They were both twenty-three.

Alice and Frank were having similar thoughts as they watched the five children and friends. These children sometimes acted their physical ages and at others their much older intellects could not help but come to the fore. People who either did not have need to observe them closely or generally paid children little mind would never see the "older ones" lurking just below their still childlike exteriors. But the Longbottoms knew better. They had been to Japan and had watched as these children studied in courses far beyond anything they had been exposed to in Britain. Today, however, they were trying to act like the ten and eleven year olds that their physical appearance displayed to the world.

It was part of a ruse. It was a ruse hundreds of other children were also putting on for the majority of the magical world blissfully ignorant of the quiet but growing rebellion against what had always been. Alice and Frank were released from their mental prisons into the middle of this strange, new world. It seemed that everything they had believed to be true was being challenged and proven false. These children, and the many like them were both the proof that the old world was false and in many ways the challengers to the old world.

Alice had surrendered first, opening her mind to thoughts and ideas deemed subversive when she was their age. She had done so for her son, who was clearly in the middle of this new, emerging wizarding world. Frank had taken longer. As head of an Ancient and Noble House, as he understood things it was his role to protect the world that existed. Over the months, then Time Compressed years, he had learned on his own this was not truly the case.

Once there had been three hundred Ancient and Noble Houses. Each was a small Clan of families centered around the main family and its patriarch. Each had been largely independent of all the others their only commonality being Hogwarts, at least for a time. By the twelfth century, however, Wales, Ireland and England also had their own magical schools mainly because of the problems of transporting magical children to Scotland and across what were somewhat hostile lands. As much as each Clan might have liked it not to be the case, the British Isles were a hodgepodge of Muggle kingdoms and fiefdoms whose national sport seemed to be making war on one another. And, as much as the Clans might have wished it to be otherwise, the various Muggle kingdoms and fiefdoms expected the local magic users' support both in terms of wealth and manpower. As the Clans' lands and the Muggle boundaries were not one and the same, it was not uncommon for Clans to be expected to pay more than one tax or to provide magic users to support two warring nations that happened to control that Clan's lands.

In the 1190's, the magical finally banded together to change this. They entered into a treaty with the most powerful King in the Isles, Richard the First of England. The treaty freed them from their Muggle Lords and allowed them to rule themselves as they saw fit, provided that the magical allied themselves with the English Crown. It was not an alliance as Muggles would understand the term. The magicals were not expected to support the Crown in their wars. Rather, the magicals were expected to stay out of the way. They would keep the King's Peace within their world and prevent magic from interfering with the Crown or from being used to harm the Crown or its subjects. To seal the agreement, each of the Heads of the then three hundred Clans took a magical oath binding themselves and all their heirs pursuant to the terms of the Treaty to the King and all rightful successors to the throne in perpetuity. Should any Clan Head ever stand against the throne or become a threat to the peace and stability of the non-magical realm, their entire clan would lose its magic forever.

The Journals of the Houses Black, Longbottom and Potter all dated back to before the founding of Hogwarts which itself was at least two hundred and fifty years old when the Treaty was signed. Frank had read the relevant entries regarding the Treaty, all diligently identified,



copied and compiled over the last couple of years or so by these children. Well, he thought, it was mostly Hermione Granger, but the others clearly helped out. There had been questions as to the effect and what might cause the Treaty to end.

The first such questions occurred in the fifteenth century when the succession to the English throne was in doubt and two rival lines fought for control in what became the War of the Roses. A third, lesser line – the Tudors – eventually took control, ending the direct line of succession dating back to William the First who defeated a rival claimant to the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom (Harold Godwinson) at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Magical Chroniclers wondered whether that broke the Oath. One Ancient and Noble House, apparently, decided to find out and lost its magic forever. The other Houses learned that Henry Tudor, known to history as King Henry VII, was descended from Matilda, the wife of William I.

As it would later turn out as dynasty replaced dynasty, every King or Queen of England and later Britain had that same common ancestor. Any doubt was dispelled when it was shown that four Ancient and Noble families lost their magic in the 1970's during Voldemort's attempted rise to power. Three Heads were Death Eaters. The fourth was an Oblivator whose job was to erase the memories of Muggles, as it was forbidden to use magic against Her Majesty's subjects. The Oath and consequences for breach remained in full force even eight hundred years later.

The true implications were staggering, Frank realized when he learned of this past. The legal and magical authority to rule Magical Britain rested not with any witch or wizard, but with the Crown. At the time of the Treaty, the oaths taken by the three hundred wizards united magical Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales under the English King centuries before such unification happened in the Muggle world and survived the independence of the Republic of Ireland. Those three hundred became nobles within the English nobility and as such exercised the King's authority on his behalf. They were collectively called the Magical Council. They, in turn, had authority to set up the organs that would actually govern day to day. That was the birth of the Wizengamot, the government created by the Magical Council and which answered to the Magical Council and the

King. Every act of the Wizengamot was considered a temporary measure unless it was later ratified by the Magical Council. The Council last met in the fifteenth century and even then it did not meet to review the actions of the Wizengamot but to discuss the ongoing succession crisis within Muggle England. The last action of the Wizengamot that was properly ratified occurred in 1407 and was a tax on breeding certain magical creatures. Thus, every subsequent act of the Wizengamot was still temporary. This included the passage of the International Statute of Secrecy and formation of the Ministry of Magic.

It seemed that all of this had been forgotten by most of Magical Britain. In the eight hundred years since the Treaty, the three hundred Ancient and Noble families had been reduced to a mere fourteen. Even among the fourteen, until recently many did not know the full meaning and heritage associated with the elegant titles. Magical Britain had forgotten the Treaty and its implications. The History of Magic taught in the schools never mentioned the Magical Council or the Treaty. Then again, the “official” history was Pureblood propaganda. Few if any of the Clans could have been considered Pureblood back then and the mere thought that Purebloods had no right to rule and that their government was “temporary” would be considered sedition, to say the least.

Frank watched as the children met with four red haired boys and a red haired girl who just exited the Floo with a short, plump and red haired woman. These were the Weasleys. As he saw Harry hand two wooden boxes to the boys and begin talking, probably about the contents, Frank realized that five Ancient and Noble Houses were interacting. Harry was the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter, having attained the title on his eleventh birthday just days before. Harry was also second in the line of succession to the Ancient and Noble House of Black behind the Heir Apparent Sirius Black now that Lord Arcturus Black had disowned the Malfoy line. Frank’s son Neville was the Heir Apparent to the House of Longbottom. Luna Lovegood’s father was Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Lovegood. Her one year old younger brother Harry was Heir Apparent. And the Weasley children’s father was Head of the House of Weasley. Less than one month ago, all fourteen remaining Houses met, although the meeting took place both in Britain and Japan. Every

head of house and heir met to learn or be reminded of the oaths of their ancestors and the responsibility such oaths entailed. It was the first such meeting in over five centuries and Frank wondered what it truly meant for the future.

The Weasley family left the group to themselves as they headed to Gringotts to get the funds necessary for their day of shopping. Luna's parents were not with them as her father was busy at work preparing to publish the most recent edition of the Quibbler, which Luna had assured them was going to throw a little more fuel on the ongoing Time Chamber Scandal, but that would be on page two or three because her Daddy felt the most recent sightings of a suspected Crumple Horned Snorkack near Falmouth was more important even if it was probably rubbish. After all, everyone knew the Snorkack was not native to Britain. Luna's mother was at home taking care of Luna's one year old brother and sister. Frank remembered that had it not been for Luna's friends, including his son, Jasmine Lovegood would have died in a fire almost two years ago now and the two youngest Lovegoods would never have been born.

The trip to Gringotts was quick. There were mercifully no heart stopping rides on the Goblins mine carts into the subterranean vaults. The Heads of Ancient and Noble Houses were not treated with such disdain by the Goblins. Apparently, the cart rides were more to humble wizards than because the wizards were absolutely needed to access the vault to withdraw money.

Their magical money bags filled with galleons, the coin of the magical realm, the group split up. Neville and Luna went with Alice to do their shopping while Frank took Harry, Hermione and Clarice. Frank really did not mind Alice taking Neville, as he hated shopping or at least Alice's idea of shopping which was to spend hours looking and not buying anything. The Grangers had told him that these three would only be a pain in two stores: Quality Quidditch Supplies, which Harry and Clarice loved, and Flourish & Blotts bookstore, which all three might take an interest in. Frank decided these two were last on the list.

The first stop was Madam Malkins for wizarding attire. The kids were perfectly practical. Despite the proprietor's best efforts, if it was not on

their school list, they were not interested. They each bought three sets of black, Hogwarts academic robes and heavy duty robes for “dirty” classes, specifically Potions and Herbology. There were then mercifully quick stops at The Magic Users Warehouse & Emporium where the children bought cauldrons, scales, and other potion equipment; The Stargazer Shoppe where they purchased a telescope and star charts for Astronomy and Carwell’s Apothecary for their First Year Potions ingredients. Not surprisingly, Harry the Potions Master was not thrilled with the lack of selection. Then again, Hermione reminded him he had a full, Master’s Level Lab at home, including ingredients that were hard to obtain in Britain. The Potions done, they hit the Scrivener’s Loft where they purchased blank parchment, quills and ink. Hermione complained about the archaic writing implements. Except for calligraphy and Runes classes, the Japanese school used modern pens and paper which were both less expensive and not nearly as messy.

Their next stop was Dylway’s on Hermione’s suggestion. This shop sold magical trunks and luggage and was where most Hogwarts students bought their trunks. Most first time students bought very simple trunks that only had a magical locking charm. The kids knew the charms were not terribly difficult to unlock, so given some of their less than school issue kit, such as staves, extra, unregistered wands, “banned” books, Master’s Level equipment and Defense Master weapons, something far more sophisticated was in order. The kids were not going to abandon their former training just because they were “attending” Hogwarts and they needed the necessary tools.

The trunks they purchased were not the highest end available. Those had features not unlike the magical tents that this store also sold. In theory at least, and for enough gold, a witch or wizard could buy a trunk that had a veritable palace inside. Such luxuries were just that, as well as a bit fantastical. Even if one could buy such a trunk, there did not seem to be any demand. The trunks Harry and the others bought had no secret rooms or apartments or any such frivolities. They were trunks, not secret hide-a-way fortresses to be forgotten in a closet no one used or would search. But, they still had features. There were compartments within compartments, none of which could be detected with any degree of ease and all of them as difficult to break into as the trunk itself. These trunks could hold a ton or more of

stuff, most all of it invisible and inaccessible to all but the owner. Even full, an eleven year old Harry could lift it with only its size as an obstacle. It was the perfect place to store a Potions Master's ingredient collection, banned weapons, unregistered wands and a host of other things a First Year was not supposed to even know about much less have.

"Seems to be a popular model," the salesman said.

"A friend recommended it," Clarice replied. "Good for hiding stuff."

"That it is," the salesman agreed. "Although what children would need to hide..."

"Got a huge collection of joke stuff," Harry said. "A friend said it's not supposed to be allowed, but..."

"And I can't keep my Diary just anywhere," Clarice added.

"You have a Diary, Sissy?" Harry asked.

"Er..." Clarice blushed a little.

"Oh I'd love to read what it says about me," Harry laughed. "Probably calls me 'odiferous' or some other big word," he added more to Hermione than anyone.

"I most certainly did not!" Clarice objected.

"You did last week!"

"You were!"

"Oh, and you're one to ..."

"Kids!" Frank interrupted. "I'm sure the gentleman has better things to do than listen to you bicker."

"Sorry," Harry and Clarice both said.

Frank did note however that Clarice and Harry winked at each other while the salesman was not looking. Obviously that display was more part of the ruse to hide the real reason for the trunks. Then again, Frank did seem to recall a rather juvenile discussion from about a week ago...

Once the trunks were paid for, the kids packed their other new belongings inside and the group headed back out into the alley. Frank noted that every once in a while they would meet some other young people they knew. He suspected that the kids were probably from "The Club," the group of children who were receiving their real education in Japan. Among other reasons for his suspicion was it was clear that aside from the Weasleys and the glimpses of Alice and the others, everyone else they seemed to meet and talk to briefly was heading off to another school.

The longest conversation occurred outside of Quality Quidditch Supplies as there were several children practically drooling over the new Nimbus 2000 in the window. Harry was asked repeatedly if the Club would buy some and Harry did his best to remain noncommittal. Frank knew the Club had Quidditch Teams and a League with "experimental" rules. Among them was that the teams used the same make and model brooms at each position. This was one rule Frank liked as it truly meant no team could complain that the other had an advantage due to better equipment. He understood the need for some of the other new rules such as a time limit and liberal player substitutions and would admit it made for an exciting game given the skill levels, but the standard broom rule was one he wished the pros would adopt. The best teams in the pros did have the best brooms and the worst had what they could get. Frank was grateful that the kids did not seem to need to go in. One of the "problem" shops went by without any real problems.

Flourish & Blotts was next. They went there to buy their required school books and Frank knew these three loved to read. He hoped that with their access to three large, private libraries, they had no need to spend hours browsing in a bookstore. At first, he was pleasantly surprised as the kids efficiently collected all their course books for the coming year. (Standard Book of Spells - Grade 1, Encyclopedia of Magical Plants and Fungi, Into the Heavens (A

Course Book on Basic Magical Astronomy), The History of Magical Britain, Beginner Potions, Introduction to the Art of Transfiguration, Basic Charms, and On Darkness and Magic) His hopes faded when he heard Hermione and Clarice giggling another row over.

“Harry?” Hermione called out.

Frank followed the voice and saw the three of them looking at a selection of New Releases.

“Oh you’ve got to be kidding!” Harry complained.

“You know we just have to have all of them,” Hermione chided.

“I don’t believe you two!”

Frank caught up with his charges and saw they were looking at the newest of the various Harry Potter: Boy-Who-Lived children’s books, adventure stories and comics.

“You’ve got to be kidding!” Harry moaned. “A Harry Potter love story? I hope it’s about a boy and his dog or something!”

“Says it’s about a girl,” Clarice chided. “He is getting older,” she added with a giggle. Frank could tell they were both teasing the poor boy mercilessly, but he also knew Harry gave as good as he got.

“And you just want to be that girl, don’t you,” Harry said. “Snogging said boy hero after he rescues you from rogue dust balls.”

“Eww!” Clarice said. “Thank’s a lot, brother. Now I’ll have nightmares for weeks.”

“About what?”

“About Hermione hexing me into the next century,” Clarice said. “And the mere thought of that is just ...”

“I doubt Hermione would...”

“Not Clarice,” Hermione said. “She’d never give me cause. But should any other girl...”

“Fine. Please tell me you won’t buy this rubbish.”

“We could,” Hermione said taking Harry’s hand.

“But we’d be lying,” Clarice added as she picked out one copy of each for her and Hermione’s collection.

Harry rolled his eyes in disgust.

“Oh come on Harry,” Clarice chided, “they’re funny!”

“Fine!” Harry groaned.

After the books were purchased, and to Harry’s chagrin that included the Harry Potter fictions, there was but one stop left on their shopping trip. Even though they all had two wands, they knew they needed to buy a “legal” wand; one made in Britain and registered with the Ministry of Magic. Their other wands needed to remain secret for now. Sensei had recommended Ollivander’s Fine Wands. It was the oldest wand maker’s shop in the Alley and was reputed to be the best as well. It was also the most expensive of the three shops. It was where Sensei bought his first wand in his timeline and Sensei believe that it was a way to gauge just how far reaching the changes had been.

However, before they even reached the shop, Harry stopped. He looked into the window of Eyelops Owl Emporium and his jaw dropped.

“I don’t believe it,” he said to Hermione.

“What?” she asked.

“Look!” he pointed. There on a perch near the back of the shop was a pure white, snowy owl. “You think?”

“Sensei’s stories,” Clarice said recognizing the bird.



Hermione nodded. "But if it is her, I'm going for Crookshanks!"

Harry nodded and led his party into the shop. He looked around to see if there were any other snowy owls. There were not and he walked right up to the majestic bird. "Hello there," he said softly getting its attention, or so it seemed, "I know you don't know me, but I've heard great things about you."

"Can I help you young man?" a lady asked. Harry turned and saw a woman dressed in some kind of leather apron.

"This is a snowy owl?" he asked.

The lady nodded. "Lovely bird. Never had one before in the shop. Poor thing."

"Excuse me?"

"Well, no one seems to want her," she replied. "They're not native and that puts some people off. Throw in she's a bit of a stand out..."

"I'll take her!" Harry said.

"You sure?"

Harry nodded.

"She has a point, Harry," Frank began.

"Then we'll all get owls, but I'm taking this one."

Frank shrugged.

As he held out his arm, the large, white owl seemingly floated with a slight beat of her wings from her perch to his arm. "Hello Hedwig," Harry said softly. "I'm Harry."

Frank would swear later the bird knew that already and seemed to have been waiting for the boy. Then again, all owls look like they know things.

It was over an hour later that Frank set down in the alley outside Ollivanders. With three children, it would be a tight fit in the tiny customer portion of the shop. With three trunks and the "Potter Zoo," it would have been impossible. Hedwig was sleeping comfortably in her cage with her "new friends" in their cages beside her. Hermione bought a large, brown owl she named Merlin ("cause he looks so wise," she joked.) and Clarice a dappled grey owl she named Alvin, because he looked like one. After the owls and their supplies, they then entered Magical Menagerie where sure enough, Hermione left with an orange, bow legged half kneazle named Crookshanks and Clarice could not leave without the one non-magical creature in the shop, who like Hedwig no one else seemed to want, a ferret she named Sabrina.

The three children entered the shop. The waiting area for the customers was not very large at all and while there was room for the three of them, there was not much. Barely four feet from the front window and door was the counter. Behind that seemed to be long, almost endless rows of shelves stacked from the floor to the ceiling with boxes. It did not look neat, but there was a sense of some kind of organization. One hoped the proprietor could find something.

An elderly man slowly shuffled from the back to the counter and looked at the three children for only a moment.

"First wands?" he asked.

The kids nodded. They knew this was a lie, but they could not tell a man who sold wands registered with their government that they already had wands.

"Your parents?"

Harry was tempted to say they were dead, which was true for all three of them.

"At work," Hermione said. "A family friend brought us. He's outside minding our purchases."

The old man nodded. "Okay. Who's first? You have your school letter?"

Hermione stepped forward and showed him her Hogwarts letter. The man shrugged. He then asked her what was her wand arm and as he measured her right arm from shoulder to wrist asked her the month and day of her birth and some other questions they had never been asked before when buying wands.

"Sometimes one's birth wood is important," he said. "The Celts believed so and this was Celtic land long ago. However, birth woods are not always a key. No two wands are the same just as no two witches or wizards are the same," as he looked Hermione over in a way that made all three uncomfortable. He then smiled and went back between the shelves. He went on about knowing wands and how wands choose the witch and a few other comments that began to give all three the creeps. It was also unnecessary banter. Skilled in wandless magic, the kids could use just about any wand. They all knew, however, that a fitted wand worked best and that was a wand that seemed to naturally respond to their magic.

He brought back some boxes and opened one handing Hermione a wand. None of them remembered what he said it was made of for it really did not matter since when she held it nothing happened meaning it clearly was not a match. She went through eight other wands before she had one that seemed to glow with the touch of her hand.

"Interesting," he seemed to say more to himself than the others. "Vine and dragon heartstring, not a common combination. And your Celtic birth wood as well."

"Is that unusual?" Hermione asked.

"Not necessarily. See it a lot in very old magical lines from these isles. Then again, who's to say."

Hermione paid for her new "legal" wand and Clarice went next. It took ten tries before she finally got a powerful reaction from a holly wand with a unicorn hair core.

“Another birth wood,” the man said. “Very unusual. I might see a couple a week...”

It was now Harry’s turn and he reluctantly handed the man his Hogwarts letter knowing there was a chance it would trigger whatever suppressed memories there were. The part of the blood ward protection that made people forget did not work if you voluntarily told them who you were.

“Mr. Potter,” the man said in recognition. “I have wondered when I’d see you! I remember selling your parents their first wands. Such a pity.”

Harry wanted to tell him to get on with it. Fortunately, while creepy, the man was somewhat professional and did not waste time chatting and doing nothing. He was soon back from the shelves with boxes of wands.

After seventeen tries with no success, the man started to focus on birth wood wands only. After five of these proved to be useless, in the matched wand sense, the man seemed to gaze off for a bit before saying: “I wonder.”

He came back from the shelves with only a single box and carefully handed Harry the wand as if it was a priceless relic. As soon as Harry’s hand grasped it, the whole room seemed to glow.

“Curious,” the man said.

“What’s curious?” Harry replied.

“Wand cores are made from a variety of magical substances, although my family has only used three types since we founded our shop: dragon heartstring, unicorn hair and phoenix feathers. I see no need to change what has worked for my ancestors since before the rise of Rome. Now, in most cases, one such creature can supply cores for several wands, maybe scores or even hundreds. But I remember every wand I ever made, and that wand has a very unique core. The phoenix feather came from a bird that was not inclined to –

er – cooperate and only produced two feathers. It is curious that this wand should choose you as its Master when it was its brother wand that gave you your scar!”

“Is there any reason to consider the two events connected?” Harry asked.

“No,” the man replied. “It simply is one of those curious coincidences. Happens quite often in my work. The fact three young people all came in together and all have birth wood wands is also curious. But the uniqueness of the core? I shall be watching. He-Who-Must-Not-Be named did great things, Mr. Potter. Terrible, ‘tis true, but great in that no others achieved as he did. Perhaps you are so destined?”

“Don’t believe in destiny,” Harry said dismissively as he paid for the wand.

The kids soon were outside.

“Well?” Frank asked.

“Got them,” Clarice replied.

“Took a while.”

Clarice shrugged.

“Let’s just get out of this place,” Harry grumped picking up Hedwig’s cage and heading towards the Leaky Cauldron.

“What’s wrong with him?” Frank asked.

“History,” Hermione replied, “seems to have a funny way of repeating itself.”

## CHAPTER THREE: A DARK FUTURE

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6th, 1991 – POTTER HOUSE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry was seated at the table eating his breakfast and reading through the morning issue of The Daily Prophet. He knew the paper was mostly rubbish. The non-magicals at Office W of MI-5 called it “Magical Pravda” which meant that it was like the official newspaper of the Soviet Union, which somehow still managed to exist when the rest of Eastern Europe broke away almost two years earlier. Pravda was little more than the propaganda daily of the communist government, which was an apt description of the Daily Prophet and one that was growing in the Magical world. It was called that by many people Harry knew and was the popular name used by most of the children and families of The Club.

For “real” news they waited for The Quibbler. True, it did publish reports on the fantastical, such as the most recent sightings of creatures no one else had seen, but when it published “news” or political commentary it was about as unbiased a publication as there was in Magical Britain. Then again, Harry thought, he could be biased as one of his best friends was Luna Lovegood, the daughter of the publisher.

“Morning Harry,” Hermione said taking her usual seat right next to him.

“Morning.”

“They publish the class lists for Hogwarts yet?”

Harry nodded. “Today’s edition.”

“Am I in it?” another voice asked. Harry saw it was his sister Clarice.

Harry nodded. “And Luna.”

“So it seems they never figured out we’re technically too young.” Clarice added as she sat down.

“So? How many?”

“Forty-one,” Harry replied. “Says here it’s one of the smallest classes Hogwarts ever had.”

“How many are ours?” Hermione asked.

“Twenty-two including us,” Harry said, “over half.”

“Muggle Borns?”

Harry knew she meant those “Muggle Borns” who were not already part of the Club. “Four for certain.”

“Isn’t it a bit early for the list?” Clarice asked. “I mean Aunt Minnie said it’s usually published the first Monday after August 10th.”

“Maybe the fact that the class is so small has something to do with it,” Hermione suggested.

“Or that Dumbledore person,” Harry opined. “He might have hoped I’d show up in Diagon Alley when the main rush occurs and he’d be able to find me or something.”

“Good thing we went yesterday, then,” Clarice said. “By the way, is it just me or was that wand guy totally off? And what was that about the scar? You no longer have it Harry.”

Harry shrugged. “He seemed to remember ‘Harry Potter’ moments after he read my Hogwarts letter. Clearly he remembered that Boy-Who-Lived rubbish. Probably assumed I have a scar somewhere.”

“All the drawings of The-Boy-Who-Lived had it right,” Hermione noted, “as it was on your forehead.”

“And none of the artists ever met me that I know of,” Harry said. “Artistic license, I suppose. If my most distinguishing feature was

supposed to be a scar, where would you put it in a drawing? My bum? The man clearly was not looking for one when he said it. My guess is he assumed it was somewhere under my clothes.”

“Good point,” Clarice said.

“What bothered me,” Harry continued, “was that I wound up with the same wand Sensei had in his timeline.”

“Why?”

“It means not enough has changed,” Harry said.

“Either that or your magical signature had nothing to do with anything that happened to you,” Hermione suggested. “It could be that had none of the past happened, you still would have been matched with that wand.”

“One can hope it’s that simple,” Harry said with an unsure smile.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6th, 1991 – MALFOY MANOR, U.K.

“So he is alive,” the older man said staring at his paper.

“Father?” the man’s eleven year old near carbon copy of a son replied.

“It would seem, Draco, you will have a most interesting classmate at Hogwarts.”

The boy looked at his father without understanding.

“One Harry Potter.”

“So? So there’s a kid named after a comic book? So what?”



“Actually, it is the other way around, Draco,” the father said. “Harry Potter is or was quite real and later the comic book character was named after him.”

“A kid who really fights dragons?” Draco asked in disbelief.

“Doubtful,” his father replied. “But it was once widely believed that the boy defeated our Dark Lord when no one else could.”

“Probably a lie,” Draco said.

“Indeed,” his father agreed. “Our world chose to believe the lie for a time. They might well believe it again. Hence, he might be a valuable – er – connection. What better way to hide our true agenda than to curry favor and cultivate a friendship with the boy who allegedly ended the Dark Lord’s rise. Aligning with him might well restore some of our lost luster.”

“You want me to make friends with him? Is he a Pureblood? A believer?”

“Alas, no as to either. He’s a Half-blood whose family most assuredly opposed our cause.”

“Why would I want anything to do with that? Next thing, you’ll marry me off to a mudblood!”

“If in so doing our cause is advanced, it is a small sacrifice to make, Draco. My unfortunate incarceration has cost both this family and our cause. An alliance with this ... person ... could begin to restore us to our rightful position in society.”

Draco knew there was no room for argument. Whenever his father raised the specter of their societal status, there was no depth to which the family would not stoop if it advanced their agenda. His mother was living and breathing proof of that. She was a consolation prize and living proof that his heroic Aunt Bella was the exception and not the rule in that family. The only difference between his mother and Aunt Andromeda the Blood Traitor was his mother did her duty

and married his father. It was clear, however, she was deep down as much a Blood Traitor as her sister. If father wanted Draco to make friends with the brat, he would. Nothing required him to enjoy rolling in the mud with pigs.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14th, 1991 – POTTER HOUSE, LONDON, U.K.

“Harry?” Hermione asked seeing the dark head of hair. She was in the garden and had been looking for her best friend for a while now. He had not been seen since breakfast.

“Oh,” the boy turned. “Hi Hermione.”

“You okay?” she asked with concern.

Harry shrugged.

“This is about what Sensei said last night, isn’t it?” she asked.

“What he reminded us about,” Harry sighed. “You know I had forgotten about that.”

“I hadn’t,” Hermione said. “To be honest, it has bothered me since the time he first mentioned it.”

“I figured as much,” Harry sighed.

“How so?”

“’ Cause you didn’t say anything when I acted like it was no big deal.”

“That didn’t bother me, Harry. It was still a long way off and I knew you were – well, it wasn’t real yet. It does bother me that it might be necessary.”

“I know,” Harry said. “Still, Now it’s no longer years in our future. Months, weeks, maybe less and I’ll have to do it. You know what we

were taught in Japan. We can be weapons. I know how to kill a person both with magic and without and with a weapon or without. However, it's one thing to know how to kill a man; it's quite another to actually do it. Unless something changes, I'll have to do it."

"It's possible that the timeline has changed, even that far away from the source of change," Hermione said. "Quirrell might not be possessed by Voldemort or the possession might not be fully active, or..."

"Only a truly dormant possession would give the man any chance," Harry said softly. "That was the only reason I survived the ritual that got rid of the soul fragment."

"I know, Harry," Hermione said. "I was there, remember? And every day since I am glad you survived."

"Thanks."

"Besides, it's not as if you have to kill him..."

"What do you mean? Of course I do!"

"Sensei did not say you had to, Harry. He only said that if Quirrell is possessed, he must die."

"But..."

"Can you do any of this alone, or do you want help?"

"I ... I'd rather ... I'd rather be one of many than just the one, Hermione."

Hermione nodded. "We don't know everything about Sensei's life, about the Harry Potter that might have been had Daddy not almost run you over with the car that day. But what do we know?"

Harry shrugged.

“That Harry had help, but he didn’t want it. Not really. Not if his friends would be in danger too. He held stuff back from them. He held stuff back from himself. In the end it was mostly just him and in the end he failed because no one person could have succeeded. In the end, he was a little like the man who created him.”

“Dumbledore.”

“Yes, Harry. Dumbledore. And Dumbledore trusted that Harry so much he did not tell Harry much of anything, really.”

Harry nodded. What little he knew of this Dumbledore suggested that the man kept far more secret than was prudent.

“ But that Harry did trust the mysterious and all knowing Dumbledore...”

“Who was not all knowing,” Harry said. “He made mistakes. His worst one was the one that Harry missed. That Harry’s mistake was trusting in the infallibility of one quite fallible man.”

“And billions died who did not have to,” Hermione said. “You don’t have to be the one to do everything, Harry.”

“Still, I or we are left with the problem of Quirrell.”

Hermione nodded. “One of us will have to kill him.”

“What? Hold on! What happened? Back in the fall of ’89 you went practically mental when we exhumed all of Tom Riddle’s male ancestors’ remains and cremated them when we burned Riddle Manor to the ground! That was nothing compared with this! We are talking about cold blooded killing here, right?”

“Back in ’89, I was both right and wrong about that,” Hermione said. “I was right in that we should consider the moral consequences. I was wrong in equating illegal with immoral. Or do you forget that everyone we knew who knew about that thought it was the right thing to do

even though it was felonious including my parents? Daddy told us about his time in the Army and S.A.S., remember? Nothing really specific, but it got me thinking. Why do you think I chose History as one of my majors the next summer?"

Harry shrugged.

"I had to know why something wrong on one level is right on another. I had to know why sometimes it is necessary to kill people. We knew then a war is coming, one that we cannot stop. And Daddy made it clear that you cannot not kill in war.

"Thousands died in the last War that Voldemort and his vile followers started. They killed without any discrimination. Magicals and non-magicals were killed just because they could be killed. They killed children, Harry. Not children like us. Not children who could maybe fight back. They killed the helpless. If Voldemort comes back – no when he does – do you think that can't happen again?

"There are four horcruxes left. Three of them we should be able to destroy within the next year or so. But the fourth one? And you know about those things, Harry. Even if we had all four of them today, Voldemort could still come back one more time. The soul anchoring occurs when his body is destroyed. It then remains anchored even if the anchor is gone.

"If Quirrell is possessed, Voldemort could return within a year or so. We won't be ready. Our world won't be ready. It'll be the last War all over again and he'll still have his damnable horcruxes. To be rid of him, he must come back. But he comes back when we are ready and on our terms so that when he comes back, we can be rid of him and his ideas forever.

"And that means Quirrell must die. If he's possessed, the man is dead anyway. It's not Quirrell; it's Voldemort. And remember what Aunt Minnie told us yesterday?"

"What's that?"

“That Dumbledore ‘suggested’ Quirrell spend some of his sabbatical in Albania where Voldemort’s spirit is thought to be hiding. If that is true, then it is Dumbledore who killed the man.”

“And all we’d be doing is?”

“Letting the body know it.”

“You’re alright with killing then?”

“Like you, Harry, it’s one thing to know how, another to do it. And no, if this world was fair, we would never have to even know how. But ever since we learned of this world we’ve been touched by that war. We both now have more friends than we ever imagined we might at one time. Aside from the friends we made in Japan, how many were untouched in the last war? How many did not lose a parent, aunt, uncle, cousin, brother or sister? Off the top of my head, I can’t think of a single one, save the true Muggle Borns.”

“The Weasleys?”

“Mrs. Weasley’s whole family was wiped out,” Hermione began.

“Her Aunt Muriel was not they say.”

“But her parents, brothers ... and didn’t Muriel marry into that family?”

“Oh yeah.”

“And that’s what will happen again. I am not okay with it, but there it is. We can do something. Not much yet, but in a few years? If we can hold back the tide for long enough, the next time will be the last. I’d rather kill a few of them than watch my family die, Harry. I’d rather kill them if that’s the only way I can be sure that one day when I have children they won’t ever have to worry about that nonsense. I don’t like it. But what other way is there?”

Harry shrugged. "I just don't want ... I don't want to lose anyone..."

"Neither do I. No one can promise you that you won't, Harry. All you can do, all we can do is our best to see that we don't lose anyone unnecessarily. Dumbledore was more than willing to sacrifice others for his Greater Good, whatever that is. Who knows how many died fighting for a man who would not fight himself. Would things be different had he been a fighter and not a behind the scenes manipulator? I can't say. But how many died at the front while their supposed leader hid in his school house? Perhaps if he had led, truly led, things may have been different."

"Lord Black suspects he did not want to 'disrupt' the powerful families," Harry said thinking.

"As in the Pureblood," Hermione nodded. "Perhaps that is his Greater Good. Meanwhile the rest of us were disrupted. Not this time!"

"No," Harry agreed. "There will be widows and orphans on the other side this time. You cannot win a war if you are unwilling to destroy the enemy."

"Dumbledore was unwilling."

"Which is why he must be kept out of this," Harry agreed. "Still, it sounds good, but doing it..."

"Is regrettably necessary," Hermione said. "There is no such thing as a clean war except in the imagination of those who never have or will see it."

"It is good that war is so horrible, lest we come to love it," Harry said.

"What's that?"

"Something a general said once long ago after winning a major victory against all odds."

“Oh,” Hermione said.

Harry did not like it. He knew Hermione was right as he thought the same things. The Death Eaters never surrendered. Most were never even caught or suspected and they would return as soon as Voldemort reappeared. Hermione was also right that now was too soon.

“Harry?” she asked.

He looked at her, at his best friend.

“You don’t have to do this alone. You don’t have to do any of this alone. I will always be there...”

“Will you?” he answered in a small voice. “It’s going to be a war and...”

“And I will always be there, Harry. Always.”

“Thanks,” Harry said.

“But?”

“But, I’ve been thinking about how and I don’t like my original idea. First off, I doubt we can just get a gun.”

“I have an idea...” Hermione explained her idea to Harry over the next several minutes.

“Next, we need to let others know before we move,” Harry said. The planning began in earnest.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 20th, 1991 - OUTSIDE DOVER, U.K.

Walter Fudge was a Pureblood born to what his family said were the right parents in the right place in society. He had attended Hogwarts



School sorted into Slytherin House, as was expected for the son of an “honorable” line. When he finished in 1972, he was hired as a junior assistant with the Department of International Magical Cooperation given his gift for languages. While he generally agreed with the Pureblood Supremacist agenda, as did his entire family, he was not a supporter of Voldemort or the Death Eaters as he felt their terror campaign was at best counterproductive. Still, raised in a very political family, he knew when to keep his true opinions to himself, which was almost all the time.

His older brother was named Cornelius. He too was a ministry employee and was considered an up and comer in the Department for Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, having been one of the few in the Department with any affinity for the Dementors that guarded the wizard prison of Azkaban. So far as Walter knew, his brother Cornelius never put so much as a toe out of line nor ever truly stuck his neck out. During the War, either of those activities might get you noticed and being noticed was not good for one’s long term career - or health. The Fudge family had their eyes set on the Grand Prize of magical politics, or at least the one they could reasonably expect to get. Despite the recent scandals, Dumbledore still held the true prize - Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. But the real money was to be skimmed from the people as Minister for Magic.

While the family hopes had been on Cornelius, it seemed Walter was truly the luck one. His former boss had been Bartimius Crouch, who had been a firebrand as the Head of Magical Law Enforcement during the War and instrumental in finally getting the then new Minister for Magic, Millicent Bagnold, to approve the use of lethal force against the Death Eaters. But his boss had a son who was among the most vicious Death Eaters out there. When this came to light, “Law and Order” Crouch was summarily “transferred” to International Cooperation. Crouch’s disgrace was Walter’s gain as he immediately became the man’s primary assistant.

About three years ago, a series of scandals rocked the magical world. How Bagnold (Bag of Gold, as Walter called her in private) managed to avoid a vote of no confidence was anyone’s guess, but she did. She immediately launched a purge of the Ministry. To the horror of the Fudge family, she sacked Cornelius and most of his personal staff

for graft. As if she was so innocent. One did not make a living wage as a Ministry employee, at least not if they wanted to maintain their status in the Pureblood Society. Graft was expected as an income “adjustment.” It didn’t matter to Bagnold. Cornelius got the sack.

It should have crushed the Fudge family ambitions. The truth was Cornelius was almost honest as compared to his younger brother. But Walter was also far more devious and better connected and avoided even a sniff from the vicious hounds that Bagnold set upon the Ministry. Crouch was not so lucky. It came to light that years earlier he had facilitated the escape of his own son from Azkaban, allowing his wife to take the murderer’s place and die in prison. Crouch got a cell next to his recaptured and now soulless son. Crouch’s loss was Walter’s gain. He became head of International Cooperation and now was the Fudge expected to become Minister one day.

The question was when. Bagnold, despite over sixty years in the Ministry seemed to be there to stay. She had weathered political storms that would have ended a lesser Minister and had personally survived no less than three assassination attempts during the War. Still, no one lasts forever.

Walter stared at the day’s copy of the Daily Prophet. Bagnold had announced her intention to retire at the end of the month! The path was now open! True, with the Wizengamot so divided they could not even agree on what day it was, it would be months before a new Minister would be selected. But Walter saw this as a boon. He would bide his time while the more likely candidates failed to gain the vote while he campaigned behind the scenes. His best asset right now was he had no connection to Dumbledore. All of the more popular “candidates” were in Dumbledore’s pocket and Dumbledore was now a pariah. In time, he would be forced to stay out of his usual role as “King Maker.” Once that occurred, Walter Fudge would be there to restore his family’s honor. Who knows? Perhaps he could throw his brother Cornelius a bone.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21st, 1991 – CAMP W (Headquarters of the Club operated by MI-5), U.K.

Minerva stepped as elegantly as any from the floo that was the magical entrance to this very special compound. Here, hundreds of children had been prepared for an education she could only wish she could have provided to any of them. But she was a part of this rebellion against all that “Society” expected and, after a part of four summers in Japan with “her children” she was blessed with hope that this new vision of Magical Britain was not a passing and ephemeral hope. This meeting, however, was both unexpected and somewhat foreboding, as Minerva saw it. She was, after all, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts which was a school whose relevance might well be undermined by this place and the people who came here. Still, this Club was the future as she saw it and her beloved Great-granddaughter was a huge part of it...

“Aunt Minnie!” a girl’s voice squealed and a bushy brown haired missile a little over three quarters of Minerva’s size crushed into her in a tight hug. “We haven’t seen you in ages! Not since you finished your term! Oh, it’s great to see you again, Aunt Minnie!” the little girl gushed.

“Hello Hermione,” Minerva said. “Is there a reason for such excitement?”

“Er, no,” Hermione replied. “It’s just been a while and...”

“That’s okay. I am sorry I wasn’t there for the end of your summer. I am quite proud of you, by the way. You do realize that you are clearly the first in our family to get her degrees.”

Hermione nodded. “Thanks.”

“So what is this meeting about?”

“Oh, yeah sorry about that,” Hermione said. “We thought saying too much might be a problem at least until everyone was here. It’s about a few things really: what may happen at Hogwarts this year, the Ministry and such, Voldemort, a few other things.”

Minerva seemed to understand the cryptic response. "How much are you going to reveal?" she asked softly.

"Not much beyond this year's stuff," Hermione replied. "How we know is also not going to be revealed."

"And who will be here?"

"Oh, a fair few," she replied. "Not everyone, not even close, but many who should know and those we think must will be here. Should be interesting."

"I see," Minerva replied, "so I'll just have to wait just like the others to find out."

Hermione nodded. "Harry and Lord Black would prefer it that way."

Others began to arrive and Minerva stepped off to the side as it appeared that Hermione was busy with the other kids setting up the room. Chairs and tables were set up almost like three sides of a rectangle. The base of the rectangle was raised on a platform with fourteen chairs before a large table. There were an additional three chairs just in front of the large platform, also before a table. Each leg of the rectangle had three rows of twelve chairs each. Minerva was escorted to the front row of one of the "legs" and soon was joined by some Hogwarts students; all she knew were in the Club. There was Nymphadora Tonks who was one of the Seventh Year Prefect from Hufflepuff, as well as four Fifth Year Prefects, one from each house: Percy Weasley from Gryffindor, Edgar Jacoby from Hufflepuff, Penelope Clearwater from Ravenclaw and Olivia Adair from Slytherin. She soon saw the other five "Faculty Advisors," one from each of the other schools with what she assumed were their senior student Club Members. Filius Flitwick and Pomona Sprout were soon seated behind her as others continued filing in, several she only recognized. Others were quite familiar to her including the Grangers, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Harry and Clarice's (half) Uncle Michael Evans, Amelia Bones (who was a surprise) and her niece, many of the Weasleys, as well as a couple more Hogwarts students. Soon, only the raised table and the smaller table before it were empty.

“All rise!” a voice called out as Minerva saw Hermione, Luna and Clarice, all dressed in their Club uniform take their places at the seats at the lower table. Clarice seemed to be holding a scroll. When the murmurs died down she spoke in a loud and probably amplified voice:

“In full accordance with the terms of the Treaty between the Magical Peoples of Britannia and His Royal Majesty Richard the First of England, in this Year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-one, in the thirty-ninth year of the reign of Her Royal Majesty Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God Queen of Great Britain, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, on this the twenty-first day of August, the Magical Council of Britannia is hereby called into session. God Save the Queen.”

A few people repeated the final phrase, but most stood in silence, clearly confused as fourteen people took their seats at the raised table. Minerva recognized many of them. At the center was Lord Black. She also recognized Xenophilius Lovegood and Arthur Weasley and was surprised to see Frank Longbottom and Harry Potter also at the high table. There was another boy who could not be much older than Harry as well. When the fourteen were at their places, Clarice invited the entire gathering to be seated.

“Call the role,” Lord Black intoned.

Clarice had remained standing. “The Head Ancient and Noble House of Abbott!” she began.

“Terrance Abbott, Head of House!” one of the men at the raised table announced.

“Justin Abbott, Heir Apparent!” a boy of about fifteen said standing in the second row across from Minerva. He then sat down.

And it continued as one house after another was called. Lord Arcturus Black, acting Chair of the Council and Head of House Black rose when his house was called followed by Sirius Black, Heir

apparent. Amos Diggory arose on behalf of his House followed by his son and heir apparent, the Hogwarts Fourth Year Cedric. There was Damian Fawcett and his twenty year old son Justinian. Xeno Lovegood earned a polite laugh when he announced his heir apparent was one year of age and down for his nap. Frank Longbottom stood for his house followed by Neville and Alice and Augusta sat in their seats and applauded. Alan Mercer rose for his house as did his son Tobias, who appeared to be in his twenties. Thomas Trotter and his eight year old son Jackson, who had recently received his O.W.L.s in Japan, arose when their line was called. Finally, Arthur Weasley and his eldest son William stood. Still, three remained seated and silent including Harry.

“The Ancient and Noble House of Bones,” Clarice began anew.

“What?” Minerva heard Amelia Bones ask.

“Timothy Wood,” another man at the high table said standing, “eldest son of Charles Wood the eldest son of William Bones and Marcia Pole, born of the Hogwarts Time Chamber, 1882.”

“Oliver Wood, grandson of Timothy Wood’s eldest son Richard, Heir Apparent,” a young man aged fourteen said.

Before the muttering could die down, Clarice continued: “The Ancient and Noble House of Potter.”

Minerva watched as Harry stood. “Harry James Potter, Head of House.” He sat down somewhat quickly, Minerva thought.

“The Ancient and Noble House of Prewett!”

The other boy stood. “D-Dean Thomas. I’m eleven.”

“What?” Minerva heard a voice say somewhat softly. She recognized the voice of Molly Weasley.

“I’m the only son of Aaron Thomas born 1950 and died 1980 who was the only son of Charles Thomas born 1924 and died in 1977 who

was the oldest son of Darius Prewett and Constance Burke. He was born in the Hogwarts Time Chamber in 1907. Didn't know any of this myself 'til 'bout a few months ago."

"All Oath Holders of Her Majesty's Magical Council are assembled," Clarice announced just before taking her seat.

"What is this High Council?" a voice asked. Apparently a large majority of the others present agreed that this was a good question.

"The High Council," Lord Black answered, "it a body composed of all the existing heads of the remaining Ancient and Noble Houses."

"And what do such venerated lines have to do with the Muggle Queen?" another voice asked.

"There are three organizations or groups present here today," Lord Black said. "One is known as The Club and I have it on good authority that everyone here both knows what it is and most likely has some connection with it either as a Member, as family member of a Member, a school faculty advisor to their school's Membership or in other ways. Another is known as Office W. Then here is the High Council. All three organizations have a direct connection with Her Majesty's government." Lord Black then began a lengthy talk about the origins and history of High Council.

"Sounds like so much rubbish to me," a voice called out when Lord Black finished. "You're saying that you lot are the real magical government?"

"No," Lord Black replied, "not exactly. We are, however, the ones with the right to rule and the ones with the final magical authority regarding any and all governmental action. Historically, we merely exercised the authority to nullify Wizengamot actions that we as a body disagreed with or that we found conflicted with our Oaths or were found to be contrary to the wishes of the then King of England. However, the last time we formally met and exercised our authority as His Majesty's Lord Governors was 1407."

“Yet, despite five hundred or more years of not doing your jobs, you would have us believe you still have such authority?” Amelia Bones asked. It was a somewhat rhetorical question at least between her and Lord Black. Despite being the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, she was also the daughter of an Ancient and Noble House and knew of the Oath. She knew that were it not true that the Houses were the legitimate authority, what Lord Black had suggested could be considered sedition. It probably would be anyway as she honestly doubted there were any in the Wizengamot or Ministry who either knew of the Magical Council or believed it could still exist, aside from those who were present in the room. Still, Lord Black knew she was trying to help him convince others. Most magicals in Britain knew nothing of this part of their history or of its possible remaining significance. Lord Black drew his wand and pointed it at himself.

“I, Arcturus Black, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black, by Oath, Law and Magic, a Lord Governor of Magical Britain with authority of birthright from Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Head of the Commonwealth, do hereby swear upon my magic that what I have said about the High Council is true to the best of my knowledge.”

When nothing happened, there was a slight gasp from some of the others. Most everyone knew the significance of the magical oath he had used. He believed what he had said was true. The oath did not, however, reveal objective truth and most knew this. A person under the delusion that they were Emperor of the Universe could take the oath and not suffer the fate of a liar if they truly believed they were said Emperor. Still, it was considered an oath one did not take on a whim and while not conclusive of truth, was considered highly persuasive.

“I, Harry James Potter,” Harry began taking the same oath without repercussion. He was soon followed by all the other Heads of Ancient and Noble Houses, their Heirs Apparent and at least seven others in the room. With some thirty-four who believed that the High Council was the legitimate ruling authority, the few remaining doubters, while not necessarily convinced, were at least willing to let the matter drop.



“And for the third organization,” Lord Black said once it was clear that there would be no further interruptions for now, “Mr. Roger Grant of Office W, which is the group that owns this facility, among other things.”

Mr. Grant, who was seated with the others, rose and began his presentation. He explained that Office W was a Division within State Security tasked with the internal security of Britain and specifically tasked with magical domestic threats to the country. As such, for decades Office W had “kept a close eye on” Magical Britain. While Mr. Grant was a Muggle, many in his Division were Magicals and all Muggles knew about magic and the magical world either because they had married into it, had magical family members or had at least one magical parent. Through such staffing, the Office fell within at least a couple of loopholes and exceptions under both the International Statute of Secrecy as well as several of the Acts Magical Britain had passed to govern the enforcement of the Statute.

“Not that it matters,” Mr. Grant continued. “As Lord Black explained, the passage of the Statute of Secrecy was and remains subject to ratification by the Magical Council. Technically speaking, as we now understand it, all laws passed since 1407 are suspect as not one of them has been ratified pursuant to the terms of your Wizengamot Charter.”

He stated that the magicals in the Office, as well as those who worked for similar offices in other Departments and the Royal Household, fell into several categories. There were quite a few who had worked for the non-magical government for generations. First generation magical employees included a significant number of highly qualified Muggle Borns who could not obtain suitable employment within magical society. There were numerous Half Bloods and Purebloods as well, all of whom had lost confidence in the magical government. During the last War, Office W actually “took out” more Death Eaters than the Magical Department of Law Enforcement.

Most recently, while Office W continued its primary tasks, it was the lead magical agency within the Muggle government supporting The

Club. Camp W was and under utilized training facility for Office W personnel and was now the primary meeting facility for the Club. Through Office W funding had been made available to assist in paying for the Club Members to attend the Watanabe School in Japan. The fact that a government was sponsoring such attendance meant that the cost per student was substantially less as governments received a significant discount, or at least those governments who had a reputation for paying their bills. Still, the Muggle government had spent well over twenty-million pounds in student costs alone the past year with the remainder of the costs paid for by a private foundation. Basically, without Office W, most of the students who attended school in Japan probably would not have been able to have such an opportunity.

The various offices which dealt with “magical affairs” within the Muggle government all had funds that were intended to provide financial assistance to the magical world. These funds had existed for well over a decade in the case of Office W and much longer in other departments. For various reasons, until now the funds had never been used. In most cases, it was due entirely to the Magical government’s refusal to as much as talk with its non-magical counterparts. There was also the issue of accounting, as the terms for disbursement would have required the Magical Government to tell the funding agency how the money was being used in detail that would have prevented all but the pettiest forms of fiscal mismanagement or graft.

The special magical assistance funds were kept in the Muggle government’s accounts at Gringotts, which was why the Chancellor for the Exchequer could not and had not been able to “raid” those funds to pay for underfunded non-magical programs. It did not hurt that Gringotts accounts earned far more interest than did many Muggle investments (at least the ones that were not some kind of fraud). Consequently, these funds were probably worth more than the Magical government could expect to raise through taxation and other means in years.

Her Majesty’s Government saw The Club and the Watanabe School as an investment in the future. This “future” was the future of all of Great Britain and not just either magical or non-magical Britain. Her

Majesty's Government hoped that by funding education of a not unsubstantial proportion of the country's magical youth, there would come a day when Magical Britain would not be as closed to cooperation with non-magical Britain on issues of mutual interest as had been the case since at least the "passage" of the International Statute of Secrecy and the formation of the Ministry of Magic.

When Roger Grant finished, Lord Black stood again. "Now that we all know who is here, it's time to find out why we are here. This gathering is in part due to the current political crisis precipitated by the not so surprising retirement of the current Minister for Magic. However, the real reason is not her departure from government, but because the government is not likely to be or do much of anything for the foreseeable future. As a member of the Wizengamot, I can tell you that despite the fact we will be in session daily until such time as a new Minister is selected, I do not foresee a selection anytime soon. Historically, the last War being the only exception, it takes at least six months for the selection of a new Minister. I sincerely doubt this time will be anywhere near as expeditious a process. Yet there are matters that require attention that cannot wait until our government returns to business as usual. For that, I turn the floor over to the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter."

Harry rose from his seat and looked at the people. While he knew he would be talking, he still was nervous and not entirely sure what he would say or how.

"I'd like to begin by telling you one of my hopes for our future," Harry began. "One day, I hope, a magical child will be able to receive the same education here in Britain as we have received in Japan. I believe that education should not be limited except by one's own limitations. Regrettably, it seems to be the policy of our government to provide our children with a substandard education probably on purpose. The upper limits of what can be taught and what should be learned should not be left to the government, but to the individual. Government's sole function is to set the floor – the absolute minimums. Unfortunately, this is not the situation today. Today, Magical Britain sets the upper limits and learning beyond such limits is at best discouraged and at worst illegal. It is only because we are learning overseas and outside the reach of our government that we

can learn what there is to learn. Here, we are only allowed to learn what is deemed safe or politically acceptable. That must change!"

There was a large applause.

"However, such change is for the future. We live for the future, but we live in the present. In the present Japan is our only readily available alternative, as least for the numbers of children we are sending abroad for education. Moreover, there are challenges in the present far beyond the current political problems that must be addressed before we can begin to create the future we want.

"For most of you, what I am going to tell you for now is informational. For some of us, however, it will require action in the very near future.

"Voldemort," Harry began. He had to wait for the gasps to die down to continue as the name still created at least minor panic even years after the evil wizard had disappeared. "Voldemort," he continued, "is not dead."

It was several minutes before Harry could continue. At least half of the people present did not want to believe him and the other half was clearly concerned that he might be telling the truth. When the room finally calmed down, Harry answered the most common question he had heard. He explained that while Voldemort's physical body might well have been destroyed, he could not die because he had made hocuses. It was clear many if not most of the people had no idea what those were so he explained that as well. He explained that so long as one horcrux remained intact, the Dark Wizard who created it could not be truly killed. True, returning to a corporeal form was not easy and required assistance, but such assistance need not be voluntary.

Harry then launched into a brief history of Voldemort. Many were shocked to learn that the leader of the Death Eaters who were the violent, terrorist movement associated with blood purity, was a half blood born of a Muggle father and a witch and that the witch was the product of the most unsavory of Pureblood unions. Marope Gaunt was the daughter of a brother and sister, who themselves were

children of siblings as had been the case in that family for at least a few generations. Basically, Tom Riddle, champion of Purebloods was the product of about as impure a line as could be imagined. Yet it was this Riddle who became Voldemort and launched a bloody civil war. It was this Riddle who delved into the darkest of magics – magics requiring what was in effect human sacrifice – to create not just one but six horcruxes. It was this Riddle who was not truly dead and therefore who could return to pick up where he left off.

“But his Death Eaters are gone,” a voice protested. “They’re either dead or in prison.”

“The one’s we know about,” Harry said. He explained what Office W knew about the Death Eaters. First of all, despite the defenses raised in various trials over the years, no one could become a Death Eater except of their own free will. This did not mean they could not be coerced into becoming one. They could be. It just means that they could not claim to be victims of any form of magical compulsion. Moreover, to become a Death Eater, they had to kill another human being in cold blood. Thus the lot of them were murderers with proof of their guilt being the brands on their left forearms.

Finally, there were far more Death Eaters than most suspected.

The Death Eaters were divided into two groups, all of whom had killed and were marked. The Active Death Eaters were those that did Voldemort’s bidding and killed and raped with impunity. The rest were “in reserve,” biding their time until called or undermining the Magical government. At his peak, Voldemort had thirteen Lieutenants who were each tasked to commit mayhem or to lead his forces against any who opposed him. When ever a Lieutenant was killed or captured, one of the subordinate Death Eaters (usually the most brutal or cunning one) was promoted to fill the vacancy. Each Lieutenant had thirteen underlings, meaning at any time there were upwards of one hundred and eighty-four Death Eaters out and about. Whenever an underling was killed or captured, one of the inactive Death Eaters was called to fill the place. It was the ranks of the inactive Death Eaters that had not been completely removed from society. The estimate was that over six hundred of those were unaccounted for

through death or incarceration. Needless to say, that number stunned many in the room.

“There could be a Death Eater here,” Molly Weasley began.

“Not possible,” Harry said.

“How can you be so sure?”

“To get here each of you had to pass through another location,” Harry replied. “That location is protected by Blood Wards that Dumbledore placed upon me as a baby.”

“Blood wards?” Amelia said in shock. “But those are illegal! They are at best borderline dark!”

Harry nodded. “Yet they are in place. If you need proof consider this: how many of you forgot that I was that ‘Boy-Who-Lived’ nonsense? You forgot that a little over three years ago and only remembered in the last few weeks or so, correct?” Harry did wait for a reply. “Forgetting all about what you once knew or believed about me was the result of those wards finally becoming full strength. You could only remember after I accepted my invitation to attend Hogwarts and my name was again revealed publically. The rest of the Ward remains at full strength. Were any of you a Death Eater or their fellow travelers, passing through those wards would be impossible and trying to force your way through would be suicide. As you are all alive, none of you are or can be my sworn enemy.”

It never ceased to amaze Harry how accepting of a magical explanation most magicals were.

“As we speak,” Harry went on, “we have reason to believe Voldemort is attempting to return to corporeal form. Specifically, we have it on good authority that Dumbledore is facilitating this return.” After the questions as to how and why died down, Harry continued. “We believe Dumbledore did this to confirm his suspicions about the horcruxes and in hopes of trapping Voldemort somehow.”

“And just how did Dumbledore achieve this feat?” Molly Weasley asked in some disbelief. “Did he send You-Know-Who an engraved invitation?”

“In a manner of speaking,” Harry said. “Professor McGonagall?”

Minerva stood. “Last summer, one of our professors left on sabbatical to gain some experience before taking the position as Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

“A position Tom Riddle sought some years ago,” Harry added. “As I understand it, there is a rumor that ever since Dumbledore refused to hire him, that position has been cursed. Whether that is true is an open question, but it is true that no professor has filled that position for more than three terms.”

“Then again,” Minerva added, “the reasons why are as numerous as the numbers who have held that position.”

“So Dumbledore is trying to tempt You-Know-Who with a chair?” Molly asked.

“I doubt that alone would suffice,” Harry said.

“Dumbledore has been less than discrete about certain things,” Minerva continued. “Specifically, I know he has told many of us that Hogwarts will play host to a very powerful magical artifact this year.”

“One which would be a temptation to a disembodied soul,” Harry added.

“And what would that be?” Roger Grant asked.

“The Philosopher’s Stone,” Minerva said. “The professor knew about it before he set off and Dumbledore suggested he should visit the forests of Albania for some practical experience – where the spirit is rumored to lurk.”

“Okay,” Mr. Grant said, “you got me. Philosophers Stone? You mean like alchemy and such.”

“That’s the one,” Harry said.

“As in the thing that turns stuff to gold and can be used to make someone immortal?”

Harry nodded.

“It’s not a myth?”

“The first references to the Stone arose around the same time in both China and Greece around 500 B.C. Now whether the two magical cultures were in contact at that time is debatable, but the magicals have always believed that the Stone was a possibility and the logical extension of potions. The Stone crossed over to the Muggle world in the works of Greek Philosophers and in the writings of the chroniclers of the First Chinese Emperor, who sought the Stone and any other means to achieve his own physical immortality.

“Only one such stone is believed to exist. It was made about two thousand years after it was first imagined, for lack of a better term. The maker was born in France around 1320 and is named Nicholas Flamel. He is remarked of in both Muggle and Magical history, although references to him in recent years are confined to our history. Dumbledore is said to have been a correspondent with Flamel some years ago, although there is no reason to believe for certain that Flamel is still in contact with Dumbledore.”

“Indeed,” Minerva said. “Dumbledore is believed to have been a collaborator on some things with Flamel as recently as fifty years ago, but there are no recent references to such collaboration. Flamel is known to have done that from time to time over the last six centuries or so. About once every hundred years or so, he seeks out a keen mind for some reason and then, some years later, disappears again for decades. Anyway, the last such known collaboration was with Dumbledore.



“Dumbledore has told the staff that Flamel is concerned about the safety of the Stone and that he has agreed to keep the Stone at Hogwarts,” Minerva finished.

“In theory,” Harry said, “the Stone might be used to return a disembodied soul to a recreation of its former self.”

“Theory?” Mr. Grant asked.

“Well,” Harry said, “there is but one of those things known to exist and its owner is not rumored to have ever been a disembodied soul, so there is no reason to know for certain that the Stone could return someone like Voldemort to a physical form. But it is fair to believe that Voldemort might believe in that possibility,”

Minerva nodded. “Dumbledore may be thinking that the Stone would be a major temptation and a convenient Hogwarts professor the means to gain access.”

“A most unfortunate thing for the professor,” Harry added.

“What do you mean?” Molly asked.

“If Voldemort has in fact possessed the professor, then the man is dead. To end the possession, all souls must be forced from the body or the body must be rendered untenable for a soul. In other words, the only way to drive him out will kill the host.”

“What if he leaves on his own?” a voice asked.

“The host dies,” Harry replied. “Basically, if Dumbledore sent that professor to Albania in the hopes of tempting Voldemort to return, the professor’s life was forfeited.”

“He wouldn’t,” a voice said.

“This is the same Dumbledore who left Harry here with Muggles who tried to kill him,” Rose Granger noted. “I wouldn’t put anything past him.”

“Particularly if it does not involve sticking his own neck out,” Sirius added.

“And in this case it’s a waste,” Harry said.

“Why?” a few voices asked.

“The Stone’s a fake.”

“How can you be so sure?” Arthur Weasley asked.

“From the first references to such an object until today, over twenty-six hundred years later, alchemists have continually sought to make one. In all that time, only one has been made. That’s the one that Flamel made. Now, I’d say it’s safe to assume Flamel is a genius. Although it is possible he was merely incredibly lucky, I lean towards genius. Add to that fact that he’s had that Stone for about six hundred years and as far as we know never has let anyone see it, much less guard it. We can safely assume he has been very good at keeping it safe as there have been no others made and no one else who has claimed access to the one that does exist. Why would he leave it to Dumbledore? The man might be bright, but as compared to Flamel, he is a mere child. It would be like giving a four year old a loaded gun for safe keeping. Foolishness. No! The story that the Stone is at Hogwarts is false.”

“And You-Know-Who is too foolish to realize it?” Frank Longbottom asked.

“I can’t say,” Harry replied. “If, however, the professor shows up this fall under active possession, then I believe it is safe to say the Voldemort is desperate enough to believe the possibility.”

“Besides, what kind of fool would send him a message that he has the means to bring about Voldemort’s return? I for one consider such course of action reckless. We are not ready as a people for such a return when so many Death Eaters remain at large, unaccounted for, and likely to flock to their Master. There is some good news, however.

“If he is here, he is vulnerable! While we believe he has taken possession of a Hogwarts Professor, although since said professor is magical, he cannot take full control. If this is the case, then kill the professor and Voldemort cannot come back yet. But allow the professor to live and he can sooner rather than later.”

“But,” Amelia said, “even if you are right, that’s murder and whoever kills the body will have to be prosecuted!”

“Unless the body is engaged in activities that make its demise justifiable in the eyes of the law,” Hermione said.

“Such as?”

“Criminal trespass,” Hermione said. “Under the law, it is legal to kill a person under such circumstances if they are illegally on your land and represent a threat to your safety or the safety of your family.”

“So,” Amelia said, “what you’re proposing is tricking this possessed professor into attempting to engage in criminal trespass? Just how do you propose to do that?”

“He’s already doing it,” Harry said with a smirk. Harry drew his wand and aimed it at himself. “I, Harry James Potter, do hereby declare under penalty of death, that I am the Magical Heir of Godric Gryffindor.” When Harry did not drop dead, he continued. “I hereby claim all rights I may have as an heir of the Founders.”

The people then saw a young, blonde haired girl stand. She was seated next to Clarice. “I, Luna Celeste Lovegood, do hereby declare under penalty of death, that I am the Magical Heir of Helga Hufflepuff. I hereby claim all rights I may have as an heir of the Founders.” She

was followed by Hermione who claimed her rights as the Magical Heir of Rowena Ravenclaw.

“That’s three,” Lord Black said. “To claim Hogwarts back, all four Founders lines must be both in agreement and – er – united. You don’t honestly expect Voldemort to cooperate, do you? Even then, he cannot be guilty of trespass as he’s a Founders’ Heir!”

“Actually, I don’t expect his cooperation and he is not a Founders’ Heir,” Harry said. “I, Harry James Potter, do hereby declare under penalty of death, that I am the Magical Heir of Salazar Slytherin. I hereby claim all rights I may have as an heir of the Founders!”

Harry did not drop dead for he was, in fact, the magical heir of two of the Founders.

“So,” Frank Longbottom said, “you’re going to kill this professor?”

“If we confirm that he is in fact possessed? Yes. Well, maybe not me personally. But that’s only if we confirm our suspicions. We don’t know this for certain.”

“Then why tell us?”

“Because we will move forward if we do confirm it,” Harry replied. “Those of you affiliated with Hogwarts need to know this. The other schools, the action might result in discovery of the Club and you need to be prepared for that possibility. As for the Magical Council, I hereby move that it be declared by this Council that Voldemort is an enemy of the realm, that we shall not treat with him, any of those who support him or any seeking to treat on his behalf and that his life is forfeit and he should be terminated with extreme prejudice.”

“Second!” Lord Black said having been told in advance.

“Any call for debate?” Clarice asked. After a moment of silence, she continued. “There being a motion and no call for debate, the matter is put to a vote. All in favor?”

Nine hands rose. "Motion carries," Clarice said.

"Any objections by Her Majesty's Government?" Lord Black asked.

"None," Roger Grant replied.

"If we get rid of You-Know-Who, that's the end right?" a voice asked.

"Unfortunately no," Harry said. "We have found and destroyed two of his horcruxes. We know where at least two others are and are confident we can destroy those soon. The other two must be found and destroyed before Voldemort can be defeated and even then, he must return to corporeal form. What we propose is to delay that return until we are ready to deal with him and his minions, which will not be for a few years at least. This years actions will delay that day, hopefully until we are ready."

"And who's we?" a voice asked.

"Those who are willing to see the end of this madness," Hermione said. "There are many in this room who are probably a part of this already or will be when the time comes. Hopefully, when we have to stand against the evil tide, 'we' will be numbered in the hundreds or more."

## CHAPTER FOUR: OFF TO HOGWARTS

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31st, 1991 – POTTER HOUSE, LONDON, U.K.

Sirius Black was in Harry's room helping his godson pack, or at least that was what he told Harry he was doing. In Harry's mind it would have been more like supervising except that he really was not doing that either. Harry could have packed anything into his magical trunk and Sirius would probably have not said a word. Likewise, Harry was convinced that aside from the Marauders' Map and some prank stuff, had Harry not packed anything, Sirius might not have said a word. Sirius seemed to be more interested in talking than packing. Generally Harry would not have minded at all. Sirius was almost always good for a laugh or two. Right now, however, he would have preferred Hermione or Clarice as at least they could be counted on to make sure he had not forgotten anything.

"I've been thinking about it," Sirius said.

"What's that?" Harry asked as he made sure his First Year supplies and books were all there on the bed so he could check and make sure the not-so-normal supplies were all ready to go.

"Why did you tell them about the Founders' Heirs?"

Harry knew Sirius was referring to the meeting at Camp W with the Magical Council and all the others. "The timing seemed right and at least that group is trustworthy," he replied. "No telling what would have happened if we had waited until we were at Hogwarts to do it. I don't trust Dumbledore and three quarters or so of the students there are not in The Club."

"Is that all?"

"We would have had to do it eventually. This way, Dumbledore is not about to try and stop us or something and it's not likely to wind up on the front page of the Daily Prophet or invite a visit from the

Ministry. By the time it does become general knowledge, hopefully the lot of them won't be able to do much more than complain."

"Makes sense," Sirius nodded. "Although you can bet Dumbledore will try something. He's had it in for you since before you were born in a way. And since that night when ... well."

"I know."

"How will you deal with that?"

"Hermione and Clarice both say that I should act like a clueless eleven year old for as long as possible and let the man think I'm someone he can mold. I tend to agree, but I don't think it's as if he'll stay out of my way or something. Then again, the whole idea annoys me and..."

"Yeah," Sirius said, "and you're not about to be a pawn. The twins give you two months."

"They might be right," Harry nodded. "Then again, it might be months before I see the man. With the Minister stepping down and a new one to pick, he's not going to be around much."

"He won't," Sirius agreed, "but Snape will be. Don't underestimate that greasy git. He's a marked Death Eater and Dumbledore's lap dog. You can be sure he's going to keep Dumbledore well apprised of what's going on, especially if Dumbledore tells him to."

"Hopefully he's placed that burden on Aunt Minnie."

"Hopefully," Sirius agreed, "but don't count on it. The man's too cautious to rely on any one person."

"And yet he is planning on relying on me to be his sacrificial pawn," Harry noted.

“Extenuating circumstances with that prophecy he’s put all his faith in,” Sirius said. “And this Quirrell thing? How do you plan to handle that?”

“Hermione’s working on something,” Harry said. “She’ll figure a way to do it and not cause too much of a problem.”

“What kind of something?”

“A spell. That’s all she’s told me so far. I ask. She keeps mum about it. She says she doesn’t want to be specific until she knows it works.”

“So, she’s going to try and snuff someone to see if it works? After all, that’s what you lot may need to do.”

“Er – she has told me the spell will only work like that on Voldemort, or at least a person actively possessed by Voldemort. If her spell works I could hit you with it and you’d supposedly suffer no ill effect at all, she says.”

“How the hell can a spell do that?”

“She won’t say, except for that Sensei said something once long ago and she remembered it and it gave her the idea.”

“What? What did Sensei say?”

“No idea,” Harry said. “She’s the one who remembers every little thing. Clarice finds that annoying at times.”

“And you?”

Harry shrugged. “She wouldn’t be Hermione if she was any different.”

“You really like her don’t you?”

“Of course! She’s my best friend as has been since the day we first met.”



“That’s not what I meant, Harry.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked.

“I mean like a girlfriend girlfriend.”

“Um...”

Sirius sighed. “When I first went off to Hogwarts my father gave me a talk...”

“I already know about that, Sirius. Kind of hard not to given that my sister is a Healer and that sort of thing is her specialty.”

“Um, well there’s that too, but that’s not what I meant, Harry. Besides, where that is concerned, I am sure Hermione and Clarice are more than capable of keeping you from doing something stupid. But, aside from that there are other things a young man should know about young women and...”

Sirius paused. Part of him was enjoying just how red his godson had become. The other part wondered just where he was going with this and how he was going to talk about it. His father’s talk was out of the question. It was a Pureblood rant that practically encouraged the then horrified young boy to take advantage of Muggle Born or Half Blood girls provided the boy understood that one played with them, one married a Pureblood. He had found that talk disgusting back then and even more so now seeing as his wife was a Muggle Born witch.

“Truth is, Harry, I don’t know where to begin,” Sirius finally said. “I mean on the one hand, you are eleven years old and all. On the other, you’re twenty-seven and probably know far more magic than I do thanks to Japan. Yet, you are still a boy in some ways and...”

“What ways?”

“You either don’t really know what you feel about Hermione or don’t want to say or...”

"Would like to but am terrified she might not feel the same way?" Harry offered.

Sirius nodded. "I had my first crush when I was your age," he said. "She was a year ahead of me at school and I thought she was ... well ... Turns out she was, well, not nearly as nice or pretty as I imagined. Confusing."

"I'm pretty sure what I ... Hermione's no crush."

"Course she isn't. You actually know her and can talk to her. Can't do that with a crush. Well, you can, but not without sounding like a total idiot. You sure as Merlin's beard would not be comfortable kissing her or holding her had all the time."

"We don't kiss!" Harry protested.

"Funny," Sirius said. "I thought pressing your lips against her and vice versa was kissing. Maybe they changed the word when I was in prison..."

"We don't snog!"

"Granted. And hopefully you'll both wait at least three years before you do. But you cannot say you don't fancy her. You cannot say you don't have feelings for her."

Harry remained silent mainly because it was true.

"Physically, you both are too young to be dating," Sirius said. "You probably won't be old enough for another couple of years, and I'm sure Robert Granger would prefer if neither of you were ever old enough."

"Why?"

“It’s a dad thing,” Sirius said. “I can tell you, Harry, my Emily is only one and I think I might be okay with the idea of my daughter dating when she’s ... Well, maybe I’ll never be okay with the idea. Then again, I doubt she’ll be as lucky as Hermione, not that it would matter.”

“I don’t understand, Sirius.”

“Proof that in a way you still are eleven,” Sirius smiled. “I’m gonna be honest with you Harry. You can spend your whole life looking, but I doubt you’ll find anyone better for you than the one you already have. Don’t let her get away.”

“But you said that Robert might not like it!”

“You could well be the exception,” Sirius said. “He already knows you two are closer than any boy and girl your age. He’s okay with the idea, so long as you are serious about it. Of course, he’ll never say that to you, at least for a while. Might even seem like he’s trying to chase you off, as it were. Again, that’s a dad thing.”

“And you’re telling me this because...?”

“Harry, I know you think Hermione likes you and I know she does. But one thing you must know about girls: never assume they know how you feel. They need to be told, preferably many, many times.”

“For how long?”

“Well, I tell Sophie at least once every day and have since I knew she was it for me, which was after a couple of weeks although it took a while for her to realize I meant it. When I know how long before you can stop telling her and not make her think you’re taking her for granted, I’ll tell you. But I suspect it will be – oh I don’t know – never.”

“So, you think I should tell her I love her or something?”

“Do you?” Sirius asked. “To be honest, you probably aren’t old enough for that. But if she means the world to you, you should tell her. Ask her to be your girlfriend or something...”

“What?”

“Don’t you want that?”

“Eventually, but...”

“No eventually. Not with girls. Either you are or are not her boyfriend. That doesn’t mean you have to sit in a corner and snog her or anything. In fact, snogging does not necessarily mean anything aside from the fact that the boy and girl have hormones. But you two? You already have more than most boys will ever have. Don’t lose it by assuming it will always be there.”

“Girlfriend?”

Sirius nodded. “Why not? She is, isn’t she? Besides the fact that everyone you know already thinks that even if they don’t say it to your face, there is the issue of Hogwarts. Most of those kids are not part of the Club and don’t know you or Hermione. I can tell you, because of who you are, girls who don’t know better will one day be throwing themselves at you in hopes of becoming Mrs. Rich and Famous Potter.”

“Hermione doesn’t care about that,” Harry began.

“Indeed. One of her many attributes. She sees you as her best of best friends who happens to be rich and famous. She sees the real you, not the other stuff and likes the real you and...”

“Hates the other stuff, really.”

“As do you, Harry.”

“And the girlfriend thing?”

“Again, it’s what she is and if everyone knows that, perhaps the two of you will be left alone.”

“And if not?”

“Then the idiots who don’t take the hint deserve to be hexed into next year. Whatever you do, Harry, don’t let her get away.” Sirius then got up and left without another word.

To Harry’s embarrassment, Remus seemed to be waiting for his chance to talk with him. The conversation began with a lengthy discussion of Hogwarts in general and the Potions professor in particular. Harry was not at all pleased with the description of the man who taught one of his favorite subjects, not that it really mattered as Harry held a Mastery in the subject had already been published in a leading international Potions journal, under another name of course. Still, the description of this professor was, to use the English art of understatement, disappointing. Apparently, all of this was a warm up for yet another “talk” regarding the fairer sex in general and Hermione in particular, leaving Harry red faced and somewhat mortified. Things only got worse in his opinion when Remus left and Robert Granger came in. There was only one subject to that conversation.

It was one very embarrassed Harry that walked out into the large garden behind Potter House sometime later. He was looking for a nice, quiet place as far from the adults in the house as possible to mull over what had just transpired. Fortunately, the large garden had many such places including a bench surrounded by flowerbeds that he had grown to consider as peaceful as any place, at least when there were flowers and such. As he approached the bench, he saw it was already occupied. A back was towards him, but he could tell the long, brown hair which had been pulled into a ponytail anywhere. Quietly, he sat next to the silent figure.

“Hey Hermione,” he said.

“Oh,” she jumped slightly. “Hi Harry.” Her voice sounded a little off in Harry’s opinion.

“You okay?” he asked.

“It’s been a really – er – awkward day,” she sighed.

“Oh?”

“My parents,” she huffed. “They gave me The Talk!”

“Glad I’m not the only one then,” Harry said relaxing. “Wonder if Clarice got it too...”

“They gave it to you?” Hermione asked.

“Well,” Harry said somewhat embarrassed again, “not Rose. Not yet and hopefully not ... But yeah. Your Dad did, after Sirius and Remus of course.”

“All three of them?”

Harry nodded. “Sirius and Remus talked about other stuff first, then about it. Your Dad cut right to it.”

“Oh?”

“Basically, he wanted to my intentions towards his daughter,” Harry began.

“He didn’t!”

“I reminded him – or thought I did – that I am, after all, only eleven and then just barely and ...”

“Yet you’re also twenty-seven,” Hermione interjected.

Harry nodded. "In some ways, but not in the ways that count at least as far as he should be concerned."

"You're not interested in girls at all?"

"No more so than any boy my age, at least in general," Harry said. "Curious? You bet. Feel an overpowering need to get ... well ... that way? Probably die from embarrassment. Besides, I suspect I'll never really be normal in that way."

"Oh? Why not?"

"' Cause I don't see the need to be," Harry said.

"Harry, just because you're already a lot older than others and that you got things happening around you that others will never have to deal with, does not mean that you should deny yourself a life! You are too nice, warm and caring to hide away and ..."

"That's not what I meant, Hermione," Harry said softly. She looked at him. "I meant why look for what I've already found and would never want to lose?"

"What are you saying, Harry?" she asked with tears beginning to form in her eyes.

"Remus and Sirius said I should not – er – be ... Oh well. What I mean is while you are and have always been my best friend, Hermione; you are and always have been so much more. Why should I be interested in 'girls?' I already am best friends with the best girl there is or will be, in my opinion."

"Harry ...?" she began.

"I hope I don't need to be looking for a girlfriend," he said. "I hope I already have one and I hope it's you," he said softly.

To say her reaction stunned him was an understatement. She smiled if only for a moment before kissing him for the first time on the lips. "Am I your girlfriend?" she asked for it was only a quick kiss.

"Up to you," Harry said in a bit of a daze. "I'd like you to be."

She kissed him again.

"I take it that's a yes."

After she kissed him again, he said: "Not sure that form of the word 'yes' will be practical or appropriate in all circumstances, but it is liked."

"Prat!" she laughed. "So I can tell the other girls hands off my boyfriend?"

Harry wanted to make a crack about what "hands on" might mean as it applied to her but held his tongue. "Sure."

"And what did you tell Daddy?"

"That I have no intentions that are not Hermione's intentions," Harry said. "And that I doubt her immediate intentions should be of any concern."

"Immediate," she nodded. "But in a few years..."

"That's in a few years," Harry said putting his arm around her.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st, 1991 – EUSTON ROAD, LONDON, U.K.

If there was one thing that annoyed Harry and the others about Hogwarts it was how one was required to travel there. It was in his and their mind annoying enough that it was the only magical boarding school in Britain. While the other five schools had some boarders, that was not required as arrangements existed that allowed students to commute directly from their homes every day. Boarding was limited mostly to children whose parents were out of the country or for



reasons unrelated to travel. Not so Hogwarts. Despite the availability of floos and portkeys, no one commuted. Even the teachers were required to live there.

Even then the custom made things difficult. Every student was required to travel from London to Hogsmeade by train at the beginning and end of every term. Of course for Harry and the others who lived with him at Potter House just across from Hyde Park, this was not that much of a nuisance. But he and the other seriously questioned the logic for those students who actually lived closer to the school. For example, while the Longbottoms currently resided with Harry and the others, their real home was Longbottom Manor located outside of the town of Colne in Lancashire, a couple hundred miles or more to the north and just south of Scotland itself. They were much closer to Hogwarts (said to be somewhere north and west of Inverness in the mountains) than they were to London. Yet had they not been living at Potter House, they would have been required to travel to London just to travel back north by train. Not only that, but Hermione had figured out the rail line the train used and knew the Muggle equivalent National Rail passed through York and other cities not far from where the Longbottoms lived. It made no sense for them to travel to London when there was no real reason they could see aside from custom that the train to Hogwarts could not stop en route.

But they were required to travel from London and so they had gotten up and prepared to do just that. Harry, Hermione and Clarice had sent themselves letters by their own owls that morning to be delivered the next day. As Hedwig, Merlin and Alvin were all set to live in the Hogwarts Owlery unless they were elsewhere; it made no sense for them to be cooped up in a cage for a long train ride when they could just as easily fly there for themselves. Hermione's cat Crookshanks and Clarice's ferret Sabrina, however, were not so lucky and neither seemed keen on being sentenced to their pet carriers. Only when promised free run later were they seemingly placated.

The kids were dressed muggle style, as usual. They decided that since the blood wards on Potter House prevented detection of underage magic (and there being the added fact that of the seven adults currently living there only the Grangers were not magical) they would shrink their trunks rather than try and cart them to the station.

Each child (including Neville) had a backpack which held their shrunken trunks, their Hogwarts uniforms and robes as well as any other items they decided they would pack for the train ride. The thought was, it would be much easier to get from their home to King's Cross station via the Underground that way than if they also had to lug around their trunks at full size.

Getting from their home to King's Cross was much easier by Underground than by car. True, it was a Sunday when London traffic was almost tolerable, but parking was always an issue and the parking near King's Cross could be problematic. The Station was not only one of two major rail terminals, one just across Pancras Road from the other, but there were more than a few shops and such in the immediate vicinity which were bound to attract people even on Sunday. It was not that much of a deal to walk out their hidden front door on Baywater Road and walk the two blocks to the Lancaster Gate Underground Station to catch the eastbound Central Line train. They changed trains to a northbound Victoria Line at Oxford Circus that stopped at St. Pancras/King's Cross.

As a group, they had selected to use non-magical transport for many reasons. First and foremost were the Grangers. They were not magical after all and while they had each experienced forms of magical transport, neither of them were comfortable with any aside from portals. The Grangers had used the portal from the Leaky Cauldron into Diagon Alley and had a portal set up in their Dental Surgery that connected their Muggle office with the one they now had in Diagon Alley. Rose had also used the portal in Japan which connected the Watanabe School with the Muggle airport in Tokyo. Portals were instantaneous and about as difficult to use as stepping through a door. They were also rare and expensive and tended to be permanent due to the cost.

Using the Floo network was possible, even for the Grangers, but there were few who liked it. It was at best messy as one almost always exited the fireplace on the far side covered with soot and at worst highly uncomfortable. Harry was convinced he was genetically disposed to never Floo right. He always seemed to land either on his face or rear and apparently Sensei had never mastered the Floo either. Besides, Floo travel was not recommended for people with

very small children; which meant that Sirius and Sophie had to find another way to get to King's Cross as they wanted to bring little Emily with them.

There was another reason why using the Floo was a less than ideal option. King's Cross, while a large train station was just a train station. There were no fireplaces that could form the terminus of a Floo connection. True, Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  was actually accessed via a portal and had the magical thought about it they could have placed fireplaces at the magical platform, but that had not been done. While many magical folk did travel to catch the Hogwarts Express by Floo, they arrived at another location and walked to the station. The residents of Potter House, living as they did in both the magical and non-magical worlds were very comfortable with the Underground as was any self respecting Londoner and really saw little need for using magical transport except over long distances or in emergencies. Thus, much of the household travelled to King's Cross by Muggle means.

However, while they arrived at King's Cross Underground station, they did not proceed into the rail station itself. When they stepped off the Victoria Line train, it was just after 7:30 in the morning and the train to Hogsmeade Station (and Hogwarts) was not due to board until 10:30 or so. There was a reason why they had arrived so early on a Sunday morning and that reason was located in the huge building just to the west of King's Cross Station on Euston Road. Both King's Cross and their destination fronted upon the major London thoroughfare and were separated by Pancras Road, a less travelled street.

Their destination that morning was a huge, multi-storied red brick building that was so ornate one might think it a palace. It was considered one of the finest examples of Victorian architecture in London. The side closest to King's Cross had a towering clock tower that might have been a London Landmark or world renown, were it not for the fact that London was already home to the most iconic clock tower in the world Big Ben which loomed over the Houses of Parliament and the River Thames. At the center of the building along Euston Road was another, lesser tower reminiscent of a castle gate house with a huge, arched entry into the building itself. The building was a hotel, once known as the Midlands Grand Hotel, but it had

since been renamed when the Midlands Rail line which had built it back in the mid-nineteenth century had been consolidated along with all other railroads into British Rail. The Hotel was also the entry into another railway station: St. Pancras.

As a rail station, St. Pancras was of little use to the magicals. The station provided service mainly to the west and midlands (hence the name of the line that gave name to the original hotel). King's Cross was the terminus of the East Line which provided service to the north and east of England and Scotland, all the way north to Inverness. There was a magical branch line near Inverness that led to Hogsmeade Valley. But as a hotel, the entrance to St. Pancras was well known and used by the magicals. It was built decades before central air and was originally heated by scores upon scores of fireplaces. Thus it was ideally suited for Floo connections and was the largest Floo connection in London outside of Diagon Alley itself. The magical world occupied a magical floor of the hotel that existed in some state between the non-magical third and fourth floors and was unimaginatively referred to as Floor 3  $\frac{3}{4}$ . In addition to the Floo connections, it was also a magical hotel and boasted one of the best restaurants in magical London.

This restaurant was the destination for Harry and the others as they entered the old Hotel from Euston Street. Its Sunday morning buffet was well known in the magical world, if a little pricey and it was Lord Black's idea to enjoy the fare before sending the kids off to Hogwarts. Besides, it would allow those who were not traveling to King's Cross by Underground a place to meet those who were. The Grangers and their three charges, the Blacks, Remus Lupin and Neville were soon joined by Augusta, Frank and Alice Longbottom, the Lovegoods (including young Harry and Hermione), Lord Black, Dora Tonks and her parents and Amelia Bones and her Niece Susan. Dora was Harry and Hermione's Cousin through their Great-grandmother's older brother and was also both a seventh year Prefect in Hufflepuff House and the oldest Club member at Hogwarts. Susan Bones was also set to begin her First Year at Hogwarts, but like Neville and Luna (and Dora) had already spent three summers in Japan. Technically speaking, Luna Lovegood and Clarice were too young to begin Hogwarts, but their admission had been moved up a year by Minerva McGonagall, who soon joined them at their table.

The conversation mainly focused on Hogwarts as those who had been there before as students (even if it was decades ago) reminisced about their first train ride to the school, some of their more memorable escapades (although Remus and Sirius kept their stories to a minimum as they could take days recounting all the mischief and mayhem they and one James Potter had caused), and the Sorting. Of those present, only the Grangers and Sophie Black had little to contribute. The Grangers, of course, were Muggles. While Sophie was a witch, she had attended one of the other British magical schools. Still, for them just hearing the stories was entertaining in their own way. Speculation finally centered upon what houses the six children would join once sorted.

The conversation was mostly for Susan and Dora. Those two children and their adult family members were among the only people at the table who did not know about Sensei, the Harry Potter from another timeline. Lord Black was also not fully aware of the time traveling avatar, so those who did know also knew better than to speak about Sensei. But they did know of that what had happened in the other timeline before. They knew that in the other timeline, Harry, Hermione and Neville had all been sorted into Gryffindor, although in Harry's case the Sorting Hat of Hogwarts had seemed keen on making Sensei a Slytherin and debated making Hermione a Ravenclaw. Luna had been a year behind them in that timeline and had been a Ravenclaw. For these kids, the question was whether she would be again now that she was starting a year early. Harry, however, was almost certain Luna would wind up in Gryffindor this time. About two years earlier the girl had been very brave when she saved her mother's life following an explosion and a fire and seemed since then to be the least affected in any given situation.

Clarice was the question mark. Like Luna, she was starting magical school a year early (although in reality, she already had twenty years of magical education like Hermione and her brother Harry.) The question was what she had done and been in the prior timeline. The one thing Sensei had been consistent about was that she had died in the camps during the Muggle Born Registration during the Second War in 1998. When Sensei had first spoken of what he remembered of his sister, which was entirely from documents, he said he

remembered there was a Clarice in Ravenclaw a year behind him at Hogwarts. But he had also said sometime later that he believed his sister had attended St. George's which was another magical school located in London. As Sensei's memory was identical to that of his creator the other Harry, this told the kids that Sensei really did not know for sure where his sister had gone to school.

"Most likely Gryffindor," Minerva said when asked where she thought Clarice would wind up.

"Why's that?" Clarice asked.

"You're a Potter," she replied. "They've been in Gryffindor for generations. I'm not aware of a single witch or wizard from that family who was not. Now I will admit that's just a guess. Had I not intervened to insure you and Harry were in the same year, who knows? You were actually down for St. George's."

"How did that happen?" Susan asked. "I thought family always went to the same school."

"Ordinarily that is true," Minerva said. "School roles are usually by family. Before that terrible night Clarice was not yet assigned. You don't get assigned to any school until there is some manifestation of accidental magic. When Clarice finally expressed magic, she was the adopted daughter of the Jamesons and considered Muggle Born. One Muggle Born in ten gets into Hogwarts and they are selected from each of the other school regions at random."

"What about Harry?" Hermione asked. "What about me?"

"I don't know for certain if Harry was down for Hogwarts yet when it happened and he wound up with his Aunt. If he wasn't, then he got in the same way you did," Minerva said.

"How's that?"

“In your case, I made sure you were on Hogwarts rolls once you first expressed magic. My guess is if Harry was assigned to school after his parents died, Dumbledore made sure it was Hogwarts.”

“You can do that?”

Minerva nodded. “As Deputy Headmistress, I do have that authority. I’ve exercised it on a total of three occasions in my sixteen years, including your case.”

“And the other two?”

“The other two are Luna and Clarice, both of whom are entering a year early and in Clarice’s case; she was transferred off of St. George’s rolls. I had no intention of breaking your little group up either by year or school. Call me weak willed...”

“Don’t believe that for a minute,” Sirius laughed.

The conversation returned to speculating about houses. Susan revealed that both her parents were in Huffelpuff, although her Mum was a Muggle Born. The Bones family, however, had been in Huffelpuff for generations too numerous to count so she was sure she would be joining Dora Tonks’ house. Neville noted that Longbottoms had been Gryffindors forever it seemed. He admitted that had anyone asked him a few years ago before he became friends with Harry, Hermione, Clarice and Luna and began doing magic, he and many others assumed he was a Squib because no one could remember him ever doing accidental magic.

“Not true,” Alice said. “You did just after your first birthday, Neville.” That led to a conversation on why it had not happened in the interim and it was agreed if not proven that there might have been a connection between the loss of his parents and his suppressed magical ability.

Hermione had also come from a family of Gryffindors dating back for generations. Minerva noted that many could easily have fit into Ravenclaw which was known for intellectuals, but it had been a long

time since there had been a Ravenclaw ancestor. (Although most at the table knew Hermione was the magical heir of Rowena Ravenclaw, this matter as well as the fact that the magical heirs of the other three founders were present was not revealed to their other guests.) However, before anyone could get too comfortable as to their future houses, Sirius and Dora reminded the gathering that family legacies might well be coincidental or at least avoidable. While Dora's father was a Muggle Born Ravenclaw, her mother was a Black and like Sirius's ancestors, for generations all Blacks were Slytherins. Sirius had been the first Black not to be sorted into Slytherin in over three hundred years near as any could tell. Dora was not sorted into either of her parents' houses. However both Dora and Sirius did note that when they were called to be sorted they focused on letting that manky hat know that Slytherin was right out, as Sirius put it. So perhaps one's desire could affect their placement, or at least the hat would not send a child to a House they desperately wanted to avoid.

The six younger kids then began asking Dora questions about the Hogwarts club. They were all Club members and such, but as none of them had ever seen Hogwarts, they did not know really how the Club operated there. Harry, Hermione and Clarice were only somewhat familiar with it as they had received correspondence from Hogwarts as well as all five other schools in Britain regarding how their clubs operated and how they preserved the secret that an increasing number of young British witches and wizards were becoming far more educated than could otherwise be possible. The policy at the Schools was to "hide in the open."

Dora explained that the Clubs both were and were not secret. That there was a large Club and who many of its members were was not kept secret. It was not advertised either, but no one would deny that a club existed. As all members of the club studied occlumency and any who had finished a summer in Japan were fairly well skilled in the mind arts, there was little concern that a teacher might detect any deception, even one skilled in the arts. Club business was not discussed outside of the Club's corridor, which had been an unused corridor on the Fourth Floor of the castle with several unused classrooms that had been converted to Club use and like the House Common Rooms could only be accessed by password. Passwords were in Japanese and changed at least weekly. The Weasley boys



had charmed the “gatekeeper” portrait that allowed entrance not only to recognize the proper password but to recognize each person allowed access. Only Club members and the three members of the faculty who did know about the Club could enter.

However, outside the Club corridor, those who were not members only knew there was a Club. Any rumor that deviated from the truth was generally encouraged to circulate among the rest of the students and staff. Many thought it was for kids who were into Quidditch as there was a group of members from all four houses who booked practice times on the pitch. Others thought they were a collection of study groups as Club members tended to do well in class. Some Slytherins thought it was a bastion of Blood Traitors and this too was encouraged. As far as Minerva and Dora knew, no one had yet figured out that a large part of the membership were years ahead of their peers. The Club’s concern was that this would be the first year where a significant portion of the entering First Year students were long time Club members who had spent at least a year in Japan or more and they were very curious how that would work. Dora said the best thing to do was act stupid. Never outperform the best non-Club member in any class. In other words, let a non Club member get the lesson first, and then coast through it. It seemed to work last year when a large number of Second through Fourth Year students had spent their summer in Japan.

Much to Hermione’s horror, it was also highly recommended to not study much for exams and to intentionally do poorly on homework assignments. The Club had “other things” to keep the majority of the members occupied so that the year at school was not “wasted.”

“It’s not like we won’t have other things to do,” Harry whispered to her. She knew it was true with the horcruxes, Voldemort and other projects looming before them. Not doing her best in all things was a foreign concept to her.

At around nine-thirty, both Minerva and the Tonks took their leave. Minerva was heading back to Hogwarts and would see the rest of them later. She reminded them that at that school, she was a Professor and Deputy Headmistress (outside the Club Corridor) and they would have to try and remember to address her that way. Dora

told the others she had some Prefect things to do before the rush for the trains began. Remus and Sirius both openly wondered about that after Dora left.

“You ever show up an hour and a half before the train departed?” Sirius asked his friend.

“Once,” Remus said. “First time as a Prefect. It was a waste. I was practically the only one there for the first hour or so.”

Several minutes later, the remaining group having paid their bill rose from their seats and began their short trek to King's Cross. They left through the main entrance to the Hotel and St. Pancras Station and walked the less than one block to the main entrance to King's Cross. Someone noted that for most magicals, this walk was their longest exposure to the Muggle world. Once inside the station, they found the long, concrete walkway for Platforms 9 and 10 and walked down through the relatively light crowds waiting to board the trains or waiting for their train to arrive until they found a specific brick wall where they stopped. Sirius explained that this was their portal to their platform and led the group through. It took a while for them to pass from the Muggle station to the magical one as they had to pass through the brick wall in a manner so as not to attract attention, but after a few minutes, the whole group was through and into what looked like a waiting room. Sirius then led them through a set of doors onto an almost identical looking rail platform bearing the sign “Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  Hogwarts Express.”

The first thing Harry and the others saw was a huge, steam locomotive. Its boiler was painted bright scarlet and on the front of the boiler was a gold lettered sign that proudly proclaimed that it was the Hogwarts Express. Steam wafted from its piston assembly just forward of the silver driving rods and huge drive wheels. Even though Harry had been told about this locomotive for a long time, it still was impressive to see for real.

“Cool!” he said.

“It's antiquated,” Hermione observed.

“But steam engines are so cool!” Harry replied.

Hermione looked at her father. “Don’t look at me,” he said. “I happen to agree that it’s cool.”

Harry looked down the line past the engine. There was a tender immediately behind. In fact, had he not known the train was associated with the world of magic; he would never have been able to tell just by looking. Behind the tender he saw two baggage carriages followed by several passenger carriages. While it was clearly at least forty or more years out of date, it otherwise looked like a passenger train. In a way it was a little exciting as the only trains Harry had been on (aside from a ride at Disney World a few years earlier and the French high speed rail from Paris to Marseilles two summers ago) was the London Underground.

The group stepped out onto the platform and rounded a barrier and saw lines of students facing the train. Behind them, they could see parents and family as well. Even a cursory glance showed that the kids were all Club members. There seemed to be five groups of students each group with an older student standing in front and finally facing them was Dora.

“Okay,” Harry said to Hermione, “any idea what this is about?”

Hermione could only shrug.

“Here they are!” a voice called. “First Years all present!”

Harry and the others could see Percy Weasley standing in front of a group of some sixteen students whom he knew were all going to be starting Hogwarts. He already knew that Percy had somehow made Prefect in Gryffindor despite giving McGonagall at least as many grey hairs as his two older brothers. Harry had also heard that Percy was adept at avoiding detentions and had grades that made him all but impossible to ignore for the position. He recalled McGonagall saying that she was hoping to have at least one Club member Prefect from each House.

“Gryffindors all present,” a girl called out from the far end of the platform. Harry recognized her and realized she was also a Prefect and a Club member.

“Huffelpuffs all present,” a deeper voice called out. It belonged to yet another Club member Prefect.

“Ravenclaws present,” a girl called out. Harry knew her name if only because Penelope Clearwater and Percy Weasley had been an item all last year and all summer in Japan.

“Slytherins present,” Olivia Adair said. She was the Slytherin Fifth Year Prefect and had been in the Club for three years and two summers in Japan. Harry remembered that she and the other Slytherin Club members were almost a House within a House as they refused to toe the Slytherin line and harass other houses in general and non-Purebloods in particular. Their membership in a Club that freely admitted people without regard to blood status had clearly annoyed the bigots in their House. Yet being in the Club had advantages. None of the other Slytherins could bully any Club member and get away with it. None of them knew enough magic to harass any club member with a year in Japan under their belt.

Olivia made Slytherin Prefect almost by default. Harry and the others knew that McGonagall wanted Club Prefects in all houses now that a full third of all students Fifth Year and below (and already over half of the starting First Years) were Club members. He and the others also knew that Professor Snape, who was Head of Slytherin, had little or no respect for members of this Club. Snape also had no idea what the Club was really about and was apparently incensed that Club members seemed to know how to occlude their minds. The last thing Snape wanted was a Prefect he could neither coerce or whose mind was closed to him, apparently.

But there were certain standards for making Prefect. Olivia was one of only three Slytherin girls (out of seven) whose grades were high enough to even be considered and had not lost too many House Points the previous year. Snape had not recommended her at all.

Quite the opposite as he apparently had told Dumbledore she lacked the appropriate attitude for the position. But Dumbledore had added another criterion for making (and retaining) Prefect status. No boy or girl could be Prefect if they had anything to do with the Time Chamber. Unfortunately for Snape, Olivia was the only girl in her year in his House who had not given birth to a child. Thus, the House within a House now had a Prefect to protect them.

“Right then,” Dora called out. “Some announcements before boarding! Club Corridor will be open following the Welcoming Feast. There will be a meeting of Club Prefects and certain others at nine this evening. Those others will be informed on the train as to who they are. No worries though. Watch lists will be posted in each Common Room and in the Club with First Watch this evening. You First Watch types will be advised on the train so no worries. Same drill as last year. Physical training at zero six each morning. Club space will be available for martial arts and magical training following breakfast and you are reminded you are not supposed to skive off lessons for that!”

There were several laughs.

“And as a reminder, the Club Corridor Floo will be open Fridays after seven to allow you lot to get to Camp W, or wherever it is you go Friday nights.”

There was another laugh.

“Right then,” Dora continued. “Last six carriages on the train are ours. Let’s get settled in and then you lot are free to say your teary farewells!”

Again, there were several laughs and the assembled students began heading towards the rear of the train and boarding the carriages. Dora, on the other hand, headed over to Harry and the others. Oddly, it was only then that Harry realized the entire thing had been in Japanese and only when he saw the expressions on the faces of some of the adults. Rose Granger, Sirius, Sophie and Remus had not

been surprised as they had each spent at least the better part of one summer in Japan and understood the language.

“Right then,” Dora said to them, “as I said, the Club has the last six carriages. Front four are compartments and last two lounge cars for which we would like to thank Lord Black.”

“Lounge cars?” Sirius asked. “We never had those!”

“Old Black private carriages,” Lord Black said. “Was not about to break them out for just a couple of kids. But for this group? Why not?”

“Thanks,” Hermione said for the entire group.

“Okay,” Dora said, “get on and put your kit in a compartment. Then you’ll have loads of time to say your goodbyes.”

Susan Bones practically ran off to catch up with her friends while Harry and the others headed off to the rear of the train. They found an empty compartment near the rear of the last passenger carriage and placed their backpacks in the overhead and their two pet carriers on the seats before leaving to say farewell to the others.

“What’s this about Floos?” Augusta Longbottom asked when the kids returned.

“The Club members Floo from Hogwarts to Camp W on the weekends,” Neville said.

“But what’s this about ‘wherever else?’”

“Oh,” Hermione said. “Those Club members whose homes have access to the Floo network can Floo home on Friday provided they show up at Camp W on time that weekend.”

“You mean you can spend weekend evenings at home?” Rose asked.

Hermione nodded. "Most weekends."

"The Floo is closed on Quidditch and Hogsmeade Weekends," Hermione said. "There are four of those Fall Term, four in Winter Term and two in Spring Term. Aside from those, however, we can come home on weekends, assuming that's okay with you."

"Okay? That's wonderful!"

"And assuming we're not in detention," Clarice added.

"And if you're not from time to time, I'll be disappointed," Sirius began.

"Sirius!" Sophie and Rose scolded.

"Okay, so I won't be."

"We'll try and make sure we don't get weekend detentions," Harry smirked.

"I'd prefer you didn't get any at all," Rose said. "Still, it's nice to know we won't have to wait until Christmas to see you," she added as she began to hug the children. She stopped just before hugging Clarice who was talking with Sophie.

"Now I expect to see you in two weeks for your check-up," Clarice said to the older witch.

"I'm sure I'll be fine," Sophie began.

"While I am confident you will be, I will not have a patient of mine skipping her pre-natal appointments. You are due in January, you know."

"I know, but..."

"It's either me or Ted Tonks. Either way, you can't skip out of this."

“Fine.” Sophie said.

“I swear Healers make the worst patients,” Clarice began.

“A fact I hope to verify with you one day,” Sophie finished before she gave her Healer and Goddaughter by Marriage a hug.



## CHAPTER FIVE: THE HOGWARTS EXPRESS

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st, 1991 – ABOARD THE HOGWARTS EXPRESS.

The train slowly began to move forward. Harry had lowered the window in their compartment so the five of them could hang out the window and wave goodbye to the people on the platform. Harry, Hermione and Clarice were mostly waiving to the Grangers, Sirius, Sophie and Remus although they also waived to the Longbottom and Lovegood families as well. As their compartment moved further down the platform they saw the Weasley family and said goodbye to Ginny who seemed to be crying as she was now the only Weasley left at home. The Greengrass family was further down the platform and the three younger Greengrass girls were thrilled to see Harry and get to waive goodbye to him as well.

“I swear they can be annoying,” Hermione whispered to him.

“Jealous?” Harry teased.

“Don’t flatter yourself, boyfriend of mine,” Hermione said. “You know they only like you ‘cause you were nice to them when they were younger.”

“Guess that’s what I get for paying attention to girls,” Harry teased earning a playful punch in the arm.

Harry then saw Lord Black who appeared to be in the process of being accosted by a tall, blonde haired man in black robes with some kind of cane. Instinctively, Harry drew one of his unregistered wands and kept an eye on the situation while the others continued to waive. He soon noted the blonde hair holding a wand behind his back. Harry suspected something; he did not know what and took subtle aim at the man hoping that if something happened it would happen when he was in range. The distance was still closing when he saw the man begin to raise his wand. Harry could think of no logical reason why a wand would be necessary at such time aside from an attack, and if that were the case a sneak attack on an elderly man.

Lord Black saw the wand and clearly stepped back as if avoiding and attack. That was all Harry needed to see and a faint red light shot from his wand hitting the assailant in the back and dropping him to the platform. Lord Black looked up in surprise and saw Harry and the others, but only Harry was looking at him. Lord Black nodded in thanks and then apparated away.

Harry was sure he would hear exactly what happened and who the would-be mugger was in a letter in the next few days. Near as he could tell, no one else saw what had happened, although there was a blonde haired woman now bending over the stunned assailant seemingly in a panic and looking around. Harry turned to waive at the people he liked as if nothing had happened. The train was picking up speed as his carriage passed the end of the platform. They soon turned a bend to the right and entered into a tunnel and the station was no longer in sight. The group took their seats.

Several compartments further along the train, Draco Malfoy looked pale.

“That how it’s supposed to be done, Draco?” the boy across from him asked.

“Shut it Goyle,” Draco replied.

Draco had been looking forward to this day for weeks. Not only was it the day he was to head off to Hogwarts where he fully expected to be the most respected member of his year and to have Slytherin House as his little fiefdom, but his father was sure that the Blood Traitor Lord Black might well be at the Station today. Lord Black had disowned Draco while his father was in prison for doing what was right for the Pureblood cause. His father Lucius had made it quite clear that the world had sunk to new lows when the word of Mudbloods and Blood Traitors meant more than that of a Pureblood believer. It did not take Draco much to believe that for it was the word of those people that had seen his father sent away to Azkaban and, his father had told him, it was only when they had seen the error of their ways that they had finally seen fit to release him.

Today, his father was to avenge the family name and restore Draco to his rightful place as the heir to the House of Black. There was no way Lord Black could refuse him, Lucius had told his son. Draco had watched from his compartment and Lucius walked up to the Blood Traitor with wand drawn yet hidden behind his back. Draco knew his father would give the man one chance to do what was right before forcing the issue and also hoped that the Blood Traitor would not see reason. He smiled with glee and told his friends to watch as the wand began to rise to wipe the arrogance from the old man's smug face. Then, to Draco's horror, his father simply collapsed.

"Thought it was the other guy who was supposed to cop it," another boy said.

Draco glared at Crabbe.

"Maybe they put a curse on him when he was there," the girl next to him said. "I mean they did let him go, but nothing in the paper said he was not guilty of anything. Maybe they put a curse on his wand."

Had anyone other than Pansy Parkinson said that, Draco might have given the idea some thought. However, while she was by no means homely and was his betrothed, Draco had no doubt that her intelligence stopped at the rudimentary ability to communicate. Still, it was the only thing that made any sense and it was a pity she had to be the one to say it first. Someone had attacked his father. Maybe Lord Black, but certainly someone, Draco thought. That had never happened before! People used to respect and fear the Malfoy name! Well, it was now up to him to see to it people did once again!

"So Harry," Hermione said sitting across from him, "was there a reason why you fired that stunner of yours?"

"You saw that?" Harry asked in surprise.

"I did!"

“Nailed Lucius Malfoy right in the back,” Neville added. “Couldn’t happen to a nicer guy, you ask me.”

“You saw that too?”

“We all saw it, Harry,” Clarice said. “Though I don’t think anyone else did, aside from Lord Black.”

“Oh bugger,” Harry said deflated.

“Don’t get yourself down, Harry,” Luna said. “Hermione may not have seen what I did, but it sure looked like that man was about to hex Lord Black.”

“And Death Eaters don’t play nice,” Neville added.

“That’s what I saw too,” Harry said. “They were having words it seemed and that man had a wand behind his back as if he was planning on using it. When he started to raise it...”

“I saw it too, Harry,” Hermione said. “I just wanted to make sure you saw it. Still, we’re not even out of the Station and you’re...”

“I had to do something, Hermione!”

“I know,” she said. “To be honest, I was drawing a wand when you fired.”

“Me too,” a couple of the others added.

“But the point is, we’re supposed to be First Years who don’t know that stuff,” Hermione said. “My point is we need to be careful...”

“And let Lord Black get hexed?”

“No, Harry. Just don’t get caught doing stuff like that.”

“Hermione,” Neville said, “he was being careful and we do know that. That was a Death Eater who was drawing on Lord Black. All that hit him was a stunner which is far less than the murdering scum deserved.”

“How do you know he’s one of them?” Clarice asked.

“Mum and Dad,” Neville said. “They pointed him out to me. The man was Inner Circle, cold blooded killer type. Got sent to Azkaban a couple years back but ratted out some thirty or more of his former colleagues to get a light sentence. Considering how many he’s killed...”

“What was he doing there?” Harry asked.

“His demon spawn is supposed to be starting with us,” Neville replied. “Some brat named Draco.”

“Parents must have hated him from birth to name him that,” Harry chuckled.

“Harry?” Hermione asked.

Harry looked at his best friend reluctantly. It had actually hurt that she had accused him of something.

“You did the right thing,” she said softly. “I just ... I just don’t want you getting into trouble is all.”

Harry’s face softened a little. “I know. Thanks. Like you said, we had not even left the Station and this stuff has to start happening. Given what we have to do this year...”

There was a knock on the door to the compartment and the kids turned and saw Percy and the Weasley twins through the glass. All three seemed to be laughing at something. Clarice, who was closest to the door, opened it.

“What’s so funny?” she asked.

“You lot see that Death Eater pass out drunk on the platform?” one of the twins asked. “Funniest thing I’ve seen in ages!”

“Oh how the once mighty and feared have fallen,” Percy added.

“We saw,” Harry said.

“Just checking!” the other twin said. “Well, as fun as that was...”

“We’re off!”

“Lee Jordan’s got a tarantula!”

“Mega prank potential that!” The twins left.

“Speaking of pranks,” Percy said, “you got your Warding Mastery right?”

Harry nodded.

“They teach the Fideleus Charm?”

Harry nodded. “It’s not easy, but yeah. Why?”

“Long term planning,” Percy said. “Fred said something about how cool it would be to put the Slytherin loos under it if they get too annoying this year.”

“But there are Club members...” Hermione began.

“They would be told the secret,” Percy winked. “Just an idea!” Percy then left saying he needed to find his girlfriend.

“It’s not a bad idea,” a girl’s voice said. Harry looked up and saw Olivia Adair in the door. “Although I can’t see what good it would do for some of them. Personal hygiene is not what it should be. You’d think they’d dissolve in water.”

“To cast the charm I would actually have to be there,” Harry said hoping to discourage such notions.

“That can be arranged,” Olivia said. “Slytherin is the worst,” she sighed. “Well, not all of us. The Club members are pretty good. The rest?” she shrugged. “Those that are not Death Eater spawn probably wish they were! The only reason they are not at our throats is none of them can touch us magically. It’s clear, however, they hate us and anyone else in the Club.”

“They don’t know...” Hermione began.

Olivia shook her head. “Doubt if they can even suspect. Slytherin is not known for its piercing intellect. Purebloods? Most of us are. But that lot gives us all a bad name. Still, it could be worse. I’d hate to think what it would have been like for me now had I not been in the Club. Slytherin is supposed to be known for cunning and ambition which are not necessarily bad traits. Seems that the only ones with those traits are us Club member Slytherins. Rest are just bullies and bigots. Then again, there are others as well. My House just seems to have more than its fair share. Guess if that lot suddenly could not find a loo ...”

“This is boring,” Draco moaned after only a few minutes.

“Let’s take a look around. Maybe there’s someone we know,” Pansy suggested.

“Like who?” Crabbe asked.

“Well,” Draco said thinking, “aside from Mudbloods who need to be reminded of their place, my father did tell me there was someone aboard we should try to meet.”

“Who?” three voices asked.

“Apparently that Harry Potter kid is aboard,” Draco said. “Father said we should make sure he’s on our side.”

“Why?” Goyle asked. “Wasn’t he supposed to have been the kid who beat the Dark Lord? Why on our side?”

“’ Cause Father said so,” Draco said. “I mean I don’t believe that rubbish myself, but if he did that means he’d be really powerful, right?”

The others nodded.

“And having a very powerful ally is a good thing, isn’t it?”

The others nodded again.

“So I think we should get up, find some mudbloods to humiliate and find this Potter kid. Who knows? Maybe he’d help us put the Mudbloods in their place?”

The others nodded as they rose from their seats.

The five of them were alone in their compartment as the train passed through the towns that surrounded London.

“In a way,” Harry began, “Hermione was right. We should be very careful doing anything that might expose us given what it is we must do this year.”

He now had their attention.

“Critical of the things is this Quirrell situation,” he said. “We need to find out as soon as possible if he is what Sensei says he is.”

“Should be easy enough,” Neville said. “We do know spells that would reveal if he is possessed. Standard defense stuff that is.”

“Problem is,” Hermione said, “we can’t just walk up to him and do the spell. I mean, what if he isn’t possessed? He might then know we know more than we should and start asking the wrong kind of questions and the whole thing might be discovered.”



“So?” Neville asked, “If they find out, so what? We already have our Masteries and we and the others know how to shift. Getting to and from Japan is not a problem.”

“And what about the younger ones?” Hermione asked. “What about this year’s Muggle Borns who have not been to Japan? Those are the ones we are keeping this secret for, not for ourselves.”

“Oh yeah, sorry.”

“On the other hand,” Harry added, “if we were to use the spell and he is under active possession, he and Voldemort would know we know that magic. That, and we’d have to kill him then and there and that might lead to other problems such as our arrest and stuff. What we need is a way to both find out if he is possessed and if he is to off him without his being any the wiser.”

“I thought Hermione was working on that,” Clarice said.

“I am,” Hermione began.

“But she hasn’t told me or anyone what she’s working on,” Harry said. “Besides, we have no idea if her plan will work so we will need a back up.”

Hermione sighed. “Actually, I think my plan will work once I work out the bugs and I do think I will manage that.”

“That’s all well and good,” Luna said, “but it would be nice to know what you have in mind at least in a general sense.”

“The spell I’m working on – well I think it’s almost ready, but it does have some minor problems – anyway, it’s basically a kind of patronus charm. Now, unlike the patronus, it won’t have a visible form or anything like that and won’t go off hunting dementors or similar creatures or spirits. It will hit what it’s aimed at and that’s it.”

“And how will a Patronus help?” Neville asked. “Voldemort is not a dementor or Lethifold or such.”

“It’s like a Patronus, but it’s not,” Hermione said. “The Patronus, as you know, is a magical manifestation of positive emotions and energy and is created by a sense of happiness. You know as well as I do that happiness and happy thoughts are food to those vile things and the Patronus gives them something tastier – for lack of a better word – than the real thing. Powerful enough and it might well give them the equivalent of indigestion. Anyway, I know that won’t work on Voldemort.

“Sensei did tell us what happened to him in his timeline his first year. He defeated Voldemort and Quirrell just by touching the possessed physical being. Sensei said that Dumbledore said it was the love protections Harry’s Mum had provided that did that. Voldemort is so consumed with hatred that love in any form is lethal to him and to whomever or whatever he is using as a physical vessel. Now, while Sensei does not trust Dumbledore’s motives, he does believe Dumbledore was right in that respect.

“So, that’s what this spell I’m working on is supposed to do.”

“It’s supposed to be like me touching him?” Harry asked. “Just how is that supposed to work?”

“It’s supposed to mimic the effect, Harry,” Hermione said. “A Patronus is a charge of happy, positive energy. This spell is a bolt of love, for lack of a better description. If this works, it would be like hitting him with a huge dose of love. Might kill him instantly, but it should be lethal to him none the less. That’s the best part of it, really. Use it on anyone else and it would merely make them feel really good somehow, the word blissful comes to mind although I can’t say exactly how until it’s tried. Aside from the feeling – which would wear off in time – it would be harmless. But, while the arithmancy supports the hypothesis, the spell is not without problems...”

“Such as?” Harry asked.

“Well, you know how hard it was to learn the Patronus Charm?”

The others nodded. While they all could do it, it did take the better part of two years at school to fully perfect it.

“The arithmancy behind that charm made it the most difficult wand based spell we had to learn prior to our Master’s levels,” Hermione said. “In fact, many of the Master’s levels were actually not as complex. Anyway, compared to the Patronus Charm, this one is at least an order of magnitude more complex. And we all know that while learning to do the Patronus was hard, what was really hard was learning to do it when we were under stress. It was hard under a relaxed situation when we could focus on it. It took loads of practice to be able to do it when we were not focusing on getting into the right frame of mind. This spell would make the Patronus look like child’s play.”

“Which means it’s practically useless,” Harry moped. “It could take years to learn to do it right even when you get it working and we don’t have years.”

Hermione nodded. “That, of course, assumes you have to learn it.”

“What do you mean?”

“As a Spell Crafter we were taught something called ‘Wand Loading.’ It’s not terribly practical in the real world, but extremely useful in the lab when we need to cast a new spell over and over and cannot dedicated months to actually learning it. After all, why learn a spell that does not work? So we learned how to load a spell into a wand.”

“First thing we learned,” Luna said. She had started Spell Crafting the previous summer. “At least in labs. Class room is all advanced Arithmancy at first.”

“So why is this not practical?” Clarice asked.

“Because,” Luna replied, “the spell loaded wand cannot be used for anything else until the loaded spells are discharged. Basically, the wand can do the loaded spells and nothing else. So...”

“Unless you have wands to spare, you’re wandless,” Harry finished. “But arguably we do have at least a wand to spare.”

“That was my thinking,” Hermione said. “We could load a spare, unregistered wand with the spell and use our British wands for class and stuff. The best thing about loading a wand is that you don’t have to know the loaded spell at all. All you have to do is aim and use your magic to trigger a discharge. Any spell pushed through the wand would discharge the loaded spell. Now I’m pretty sure that wand loading may be regulated by our Ministry...”

“Why’s that?” Neville asked. “I mean it sounds like loading might be beyond most people’s abilities.”

“You can learn it,” Hermione agreed, “but few do. As I said, it is not practical outside of Spell Crafting really. But think about it. In theory, you could load a wand with Killing Curses. Leave that wand lying about and a magical child could cause it to discharge and...”

“I get your point,” Harry sighed. “That problem aside, if you can get the spell to work, can you load wands with it?”

Hermione nodded. “In fact, given the complexity of the spell, that’s the only realistic way it could be cast even by people as highly trained as we are. It just is not practical otherwise. The casting aside, there is another problem you need to be aware of...”

“And that is?” Harry asked.

“While I should be able to determine whether the spell has the desired effect on most people, I will not be able to make the same determination as to whether it will work as desired against Voldemort. In theory, it should destroy whatever ‘vessel’ he’s inhabiting. But the only way to test that theory...”

“Is to actually use it on him,” Harry finished. “Not ideal.”

“Short of learning the Killing Curse or using another spell that can be lethal to anyone, it’s the best I can come up with.”

“On the other hand,” Clarice said, “it would give us a few advantages.”

“Oh?”

“Sure! First off, if it didn’t work as we hope it will, what’s the worst that could happen? Whoever sent the spell – assuming they’re caught – would get in trouble for hexing a teacher. The spell is supposed to be harmless enough so if it actually harmed him, it would be written off as a freak accident. Same would be true if it did work as we hope and killed him. ‘Oh? But it’s not supposed to do that!’” she added in fake innocence.

“She has a point,” Neville added. “Can’t get into too much trouble for a ‘harmless’ spell that had a surprise effect on one person, can you?”

Harry nodded. “Still, I’d rather not just shoot the man in the back...”

“You did earlier today,” Hermione huffed.

“That was different! He was a threat or at least he looked like he was going to be.”

Hermione nodded. “So you’d prefer self defense or something like that?”

“Added excuse if questioned,” Harry nodded. “And we have an idea how that could happen.”

“We do?” Luna asked.

“Sensei gave us an outline – as it were – of what happened his First Year. While we are not certain this year will go exactly that way, we

will know if the events that occurred far from the influence we may have on current time have continued to run as they did for him. If Quirrell had a go at that vault in Gringotts where Dumbledore kept the fake stone – which we should know sometime this week – then we know that the Quirrell story is continuing as it did then. If that's the case, provided we do not tip our hand too early and force him into another direction, we know roughly what will occur and approximately when.

“In Sensei's time, Quirrell made three attempts to kill him.”

“Including the troll?” Hermione asked. The troll story was one of her favorites.

Harry shook his head. “That one was not an intentional attempt on Sensei. He just happened to be there...”

“To save his Hermione's life,” Hermione sighed. “Would you?” she teased.

“Would I what?”

“Save me from a big, nasty troll?”

“You know I would. Although rescuing you from a troll is no big deal. Now a dragon, that would be a challenge!”

“So when will he try and off you?” Neville asked trying to get the discussion back on track convinced there was a snog coming.

“The first attempt was during the first Quidditch match of the season,” Harry said. “Sensei made his House Team as Seeker...”

“No worries there,” Clarice chuckled. “Wood's practically drooling over that possibility for both our W.I.S.E. League team and the House Team, assuming you are in Gryffindor, of course.”

Harry nodded. “Quirrell hexed Sensei's broom during the match,” he finished.

“Which, if it happened as it did in that timeline, would offer an excuse to hex him,” Hermione said.

Harry nodded. “When could you be ready? When could you load some wands with this spell?”

“I should know if I can make the spell work within a month,” Hermione said, “six weeks tops. Loading depends upon how many wands and how many charges per wand. Assuming, say, five wands with five charges ... a good number ... early November.”

“And the first House Quidditch Match is in mid November,” Harry nodded. “So all we have to do is keep this secret until then.”

“Um...” Hermione began.

“Yes?”

“And our school work?”

“You really don’t think you need to do that, do you?” Harry replied. “We aren’t going to Hogwarts for school, you know.”

“I know,” Hermione sighed. “It’s just weird.”

“Well, with your Spell Crafting, the horcruxes and finding out about this Founder’s Tower, we should be quite busy.”

“What happened?” Draco said moaning.

“You were hexed,” Pansy replied holding a wet towel to his forehead. “Quite badly, I might add.”

“Who? Why?”

“There was a girl who doesn’t know ‘bout magic,” Goyle said. “You said some things to her and were hexed for it.”

“A Mud...Aaarg!” Draco wailed. “What?”

“Don’t use that word!” Pansy scolded. “We all got hit with another hex. Use that word and you’ll only hurt worse.”

“You’re fooling with me!”

“She ain’t,” Crabbe said. “The bloke said it does what it does an’ there ain’t nothin’ we can do t’ stop it. Gotta wear off, it does.”

“When we get into Slytherin, we’ll fix ‘em good!” Draco declared.

“Don’t think so, Draco,” Pansy said.

“What do you mean? They won’t stand for that!”

“The ones what got you was Slytherins,” Goyle said. “They said you’ll get it worse if’n you get sorted there an’ don’t wise up.”

“I don’t believe this!” Draco moaned. “When my father hears of this...”

“They said they ain’t ‘fraid of no convict scum,” Crabbe said. “Said if’n you call Daddy an’ he’s fool enough to come runnin’, they’ll do him for all he did durin’ the war.”

“Do him?”

“They said the only good Death Eaters are the dead ones,” Pansy said. “And they said that’s only ‘cause they’re dead.”

“So what’s all this mean?”

“It means being a Pureblood son of a Death Eater is not going to be healthy at Hogwarts,” Pansy said, “nor in Slytherin House.”

“Does Flint know?”



Pansy nodded. "And Mulciber. They're not about to do anything 'though. Flint said he tried last year and will never play Quidditch again."

"What?"

"The other Houses put him in the hospital for weeks every match. He's not willing to go through that again just for some stupid game, he says."

"What about our Beaters? They're supposed to..."

"They helped."

"Not too good if he still wound up in hospital," Draco said.

"No Draco. They helped put him there!"

"Why?"

"Because we are on the wrong side of history," Pansy replied. "That's what they said."

"Can we get on the right side?" Draco asked.

Pansy nodded. "Disown your parents and mean it."

"You've got to be kidding!"

"Flint said you don't have to. They don't hunt us or nothing. We leave them alone and they ignore us. But, if we act like we own the place, they'll remind us that we don't and there's nothing the proper Slytherins can do to help us then. Flint said to keep your head down, mouth shut and nose in the books. Stand out and you'll get hammered for it."

"But I'm a Malfoy!"

“I’m sure that will look wonderful on your headstone, Draco. This isn’t what I expected either, but...”

“And Professor Snape? What does he say about this?”

“Flint says that Snape says to stay away from the others. Snape knew this would happen one day and tried to put it off, but the day is here and being associated with the Lost Cause is no longer an honor. We are to keep to ourselves and ignore the rest.”

“He wants us to live in fear?”

“I guess he wants us to live first, Draco. These others ... they don’t seem to tolerate our way of life at all.”

Sally-Anne Perks sat in the compartment crying after what the mean kids had said to her. It had confirmed all her fears. She had always been a little out of sorts before she learned why and had few friends at all before growing up. Her parents seemed almost afraid of her as well. Ever since something happened when she was five, and she could not remember what that something was, her parents had been distant and cold to her. When she learned only a few weeks ago that she was a witch, a real live witch, part of her rejoiced as it explained why she was different and the fact that there were schools where there were children just like her only added to the sense of relief. However, as soon as the nice lady had left, her parents made it clear that while they would send her to this school, they did so on the condition that she did not come back. They could not deal with her “problem” anymore.

Then, as hard as that was, there was still the hope that things would get better and she would make some friends. Being honest with herself, she really did not think she would make friends right from the start. She did not know anyone. But she had hoped she would not be bullied like she had been before. Then those kids came along.

She had been sitting in a compartment near the front of the train by herself. She did not mind, really. It was a bit of an adventure riding a

train through parts of England she had never seen before. She was more than happy with watching the country roll by. Then three boys and a girl entered her compartment. She thought they were looking for her seat. The blonde acted like the leader, even though he was easily the smallest of the four and asked her if she was a Mud something. She asked what that word meant and he told her someone whose parents were not magical and she nodded and they immediately told her she should go home and never come back and ... That was all she really remembered. They did not really do anything to her, but she just shut down and started crying and then they were gone. She now wondered if she would ever fit in anywhere.

“You okay?” a voice asked.

Sally-Anne looked up and saw an older boy and girl looking at her with what looked like concern on their faces. They introduced themselves as Olivia Adair and Robert Spencer. She was too afraid and too humiliated to answer or even nod or shake her head.

“The idiots who were picking on you have been dealt with,” the boy said with a mischievous grin. “Regardless of what they may have said, that kind of attitude is not tolerated. You’re parents are not magical, are they?”

Something made her shake her head.

“That’s okay. Many of us are like you in that way,” the boy said. “My Dad can’t do magic either. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“They’re ashamed of me,” Sally-Anne said in a soft voice.

“Oh.”

“They said they never want to see me again,” she added as the tears began to return.

“Sorry,” the boy said.

“I know it’s hard,” the girl added. “I mean I can guess that it is. Again, you’re not alone and shouldn’t be. Come with us.”

“Where?” she asked.

“At the back of the train are kids who don’t care who your parents are or what they think,” the girl said. “I’d like to say that everyone thinks that way, but I’d be lying. But, don’t let the idiots get to you. Come with us. We don’t bite.”

“Um,” the boy started, “I was told you did in the semi-finals.”

“Well, she was pulling my hair!” the girl protested.

The boy seemed to recognize the confusion on Sally-Anne’s face. “Martial Arts competition this past summer,” he said. “Ollie here came in third.”

“She cold cocked me twenty minutes in,” Olivia shrugged. “Anyway, we’d like you to join our friends, if you want to of course.”

Sally-Anne nodded cautiously. Compared to the only others she had met on the train, these two seemed nice enough and were not all that concerned about her past.

“Are there people like me?” she asked.

“A few,” Olivia said. “Some who were born of non-magical parents and others who were raised that way. There even a couple whose non-magical families refused to understand them. We are what we are. We are only different if we let people think that about us.”

Sally-Anne rose from her seat and followed the two out of the compartment.

Draco was not one to take a beating and change his attitude. He convinced his friends that while they might have to refrain from putting undesirables in their place for now, they still had every right to see who was on the train. He told them there was one kid his Father

insisted that he meet and “take under his wing” so to speak and they had every right to find the kid and talk to him. He knew there were supposed to be twelve carriages on the train behind the two baggage carriages. The forward most was the Prefect’s carriage which he was told to avoid. Only Prefects were allowed there, although he had heard tell that the forward part of that carriage was where the “Trolley Lady” was with her supply of sweets, which to his annoyance he had not yet seen. Thus the rest of the student body was in the remaining eleven carriages.

They passed through eight carriages from just behind the Prefects’ Carriage and opened the door to the ninth. A large boy was sitting just inside the door.

“Where do you think you’re going?” the boy asked in a hostile voice.

“To the back of the train, of course,” Draco added with a slight sneer. “I am free to go anywhere.”

“Keep that attitude shrimp and you’ll find yourself invited to the Prefects’ Carriage for the rest of the trip,” the boy said turning and displaying a Prefect Badge. “Move back forward.”

“But,” Draco began. He stopped because his Father had said that there were only three ways one got to ride in the Prefects’ Carriage. One was as a Prefect. One was on specific invitation as a friend or relative of a Prefect and while Draco was technically related to one Prefect, she was a Blood Traitor and he wanted nothing to do with her. The third way was as a form of detention, usually with loss of House points and yes, if that happened once he was sorted his house would lose points. That was not a good way to begin his schooling. Still, he was Draco Malfoy!

“Back end of the train is reserved,” the boy said. “Move forward.”

“Reserved for who?” Draco demanded.

“The people it’s reserved for,” the boy replied. “Move back forward.”

“The train is open to anyone,” Draco said. “Says so in that Hogwarts history book.”

“You know what makes it a history book?” the boy asked.

Draco shook his head.

“It’s about the past, Firstie! Times change. Move back forward.”

“This is such rubbish!” Draco said turning. As he did, he saw two more Prefects with seven First Years behind them. Three of them he knew were Mudbloods, having picked on them before.

“Shut it Draco,” Pansy hissed. “They’re the ones that hexed you!”

Draco then proved he had a learning disability. “Bout time some knew they weren’t wanted. Worst thing that ever happened letting Mud ... Aaargh!” he wailed collapsing to the floor.

The boy seated at the door looked at the writhing kid on the floor and then looked at his three friends. “I suggest you drag his arse forward and sit on him for the rest of the trip. We have friends who are wondering whether triced up Death Eater Spawn can fly without magic.”

The three scared “friends” grabbed their now unconscious leader and did as they were told.

“Sorry ‘bout that,” the boy said to the other young kids. “Some people need remedial instruction. Although I think that one is beyond remediation. You may pass.”

“What was that all about?” a boy asked.

“We don’t like Death Eater spawn and that lot is Death Eater spawn.”

“What’s Death Eater?”

“Ever hear of the Nazi’s?”

The boy nodded.

“Kind of like them, only dumber.”

Sally-Anne was beginning to wonder just what kind of world this was. She and the others passed the older boy who was acting like a guard or something and into the passenger carriage her former tormentors had been barred from entering. That alone was at least a little exciting knowing she could go where other cannot, especially that lot. The carriage appeared no different than the others, but it seemed as if she had suddenly stepped onto an entirely different train.

In the forward part of the train, while the students seemed to be happy and talkative, they tended to keep in certain noticeable groups. This part seemed far less like that as if everyone regardless of age was part of the same group. True, compartments did hold children, but most had more than the usual four or so and unlike forward, almost all the doors were wide open and the occupants seemed to invite anyone who passed by in for a chat, although Sally-Anne and the others were clearly being herded further and further back. To sum it up, this group seemed happier and maybe even more mature or confident than the ones up forward and she wondered what that was about. She also wondered something else. It was clear that there were at least two languages being spoken in this part of the train and one certainly was not English. Yet only a small number of students even looked like they might be foreign.

They passed through three such carriages before crossing over into another one. This one stunned her and clearly had the same effect on the others. It was as if they had left the train altogether and entered a huge room with chairs, small tables, couches and the like. There appeared to be some kind of bar, although it was clear also that the “bar” was serving food and beverages that did not have an age minimum. While the room appeared to be about as long as a normal carriage, it was at least three times as wide. The only thing that told her she might still be on a train was the room rocked and swayed just like the other carriages.

“How?” a voice asked.

“Magic,” Olivia said. “It’s called a permanent expansion charm. Much roomier, don’t you think? Courtesy of one of our benefactors. This is the forward lounge. We got food, drink, any candy you can get forward and such here. The last car is another lounge. So on with you! Enjoy your trip!”

Their escort left them standing there gaping at the elegant “room.” There were several students scattered about. Some were eating and many were talking or playing games. The only one Sally-Anne recognized looked like Chess, except the pieces appeared to be animated and seemed to enjoy bashing each other to bits when moved. It was almost sensory overload. She swore she heard one of the occupants comment that they were enjoying the best sushi since getting back, which made no sense to her.

Sally-Anne took a seat at a table that was empty. While she wanted to make friends, she was still overwhelmed and her main reaction was to keep to herself and observe. Unfortunately, someone had other ideas.

A girl sat with her. She was young, probably about Sally-Anne’s age, but had not been a part of the group that had been led back from the front of the train. She told Sally-Anne she was “mostly” Muggle raised, which Sally-Anne took to mean raised without magic.

“I’m Clarice, by the way,” she said.

The girl seemed pleasant. “Sally-Anne? Can I ask you a question?”

“As long as it’s not about whether I fancy a boy and if so who, shoot!”

“What’s a Death Eater?”

The girl grew a little serious. “There was a terrible war in our world, the magical one, several years ago. Death Eaters were on one side.



They were evil and liked killing. In particular, they liked killing non-magical people and anyone like us raised in that world. They believed we were less than human and such."

"They didn't win, did they?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"I met some kids who were really mean and some other said they were – um – Death Eater Spawn."

"No, they did not win," Clarice said. "But it was a close run thing, I was told and regrettably their attitude survived."

"Like skinheads?"

"Something like that, yes."

"Why are they even allowed..."

"One shouldn't blame the kid for their parent," Clarice said. "Unfortunately, some are not much better."

"And the people back here?"

"Many are like you, new to all of this."

"And you're not like me?"

Clarice sighed. "My real parents were magical. Death Eaters killed them when I was a baby. Most all the rest of us have that in common. I don't mean we all lost our real parents. It's just that all of our families lost people to the Death Eaters. Naturally, we don't like them."

"And what happened to you?" Sally-Anne asked.

"I had an older brother," Clarice replied. "He was also a baby then. He was sent to live with relatives who were not magical and very

mean to him because he was. I was sent elsewhere and I can't tell you why 'cause I don't really know. I was adopted by a lovely mum and dad who didn't seem to care that I was different. But Daddy died of cancer when I was five and Mum and I were in a car crash when I was six. She died. I went to hospital where oddly enough my real brother was in the next room. Another couple who had adopted a magical daughter took us in."

"Are most Muggles mean to magical kids like us?"

"No. Most are not. Some are and as a result of what happened to my brother, the magicals are trying to help magical children in such situations. Why?"

"My parents were scared of me," Sally-Anne confessed. "When they found out I was really a witch, well..." She reached into her jacket pocket and handed Clarice a piece of paper. Clarice read it and Sally-Anne could tell the girl was not happy. It was a letter "To Whom It May Concern:" wherein the Perks stated they never wanted to see their "abomination" of a daughter again. Sally-Anne watched in silence as this Clarice waived to someone in the car. A tall young woman came over and Clarice handed her the note. That girl was also shocked when she read it.

"Hermione?" she asked.

"Why not? Harry's got plenty of space."

The girl nodded and walked forward out of the car with the note.

"What's going on?" Sally-Anne asked. "I'm supposed to show that to an adult and..."

"Oddly enough, you just did," Clarice told her and then launched into the most fantastic story about magic, friends and learning Sally-Anne had ever heard. It was all about three friends who learned they were magical and went off to a magical school in Japan and learned magic and by the time they were Sally-Anne's age had twenty years of education, including degrees. Sally-Anne found it hard to believe that

the girl she was talking to who was born over a year after she was already had a doctorate. But, if magic can change time, why not?

“And I could do something like that too?” she asked in the end.

The girl named Clarice nodded and Sally-Anne was clearly interested.

Sally-Anne returned to the forward lounge car dressed in her Hogwarts uniform. She and the others from the forward part of the train had been sent to two compartments just forward of the lounge car where they found all of their stuff. She changed into her blouse, tie, Hogwarts jumper, skirt and robes and now stood with what she believed were about a hundred others in the magically expanded car.

“Right you lot,” the older girl who had taken her letter said, “listen up! Hogsmeade in an hour so we’re going to pass out this year’s Club kit. Those of you here last year remember while we ‘hide in the open’ we want to let the troglodytes know who we are when they look at us. Maybe we won’t have to hex them so much this year.”

“Fat chance!” a voice called out followed by several laughs.

“You trying to ruin our fun Tonks?” another voice called out.

“As if I could stop you and your brothers, Weasley,” she called back with a smile. “Anyway, new kit. You may have seen a few of us Prefects wearing it. Left collar point you’ll wear the pin with numerals. The Roman numeral is your Hogwarts Year and the others are the year you joined the Club and the year you went off or will head off to Japan for a proper education. In my case, that’s ‘VII 8889.’ We’ll start with the seven Muggle Raised we rescued from the troglodytes all of whom have so graciously – and wisely – decided to joined us today. Hopefully the trolls will see this as a Hands Off or Wands Off sign. They’ll be ‘I 9192’. Michael Corner? Will you come up here please?”

A small boy approached and the older girl pinned his “I 9192” on his left collar. Sally-Anne was the last of the seven as she was last in alphabetical order.

“Okay then,” she continued, “as the rest of us have been to Japan, we get additional goodies. Right collar shows what we’ve done, although only we will know that, right?” After the laughter subsided, she continued. “One diamond for those who have completed their O.W.L.s. A chevron for those who’ve done their N.E.W.T.s. Diamond over a chevron for one Mastery. Two chevrons for two Masteries. Diamond over two chevrons for three and three chevrons for four, although for now, there only a handful with that many. Also, above that kit are bars for non-magical stuff. One bar for completion of Secondary School, two for your bachelor’s degree, three for Masters and four for a doctorate, again only a handful will get that many.”

The devices were passed out and pinned on to all the students assembled. Clarice had been keeping close to Sally-Anne for much of the ride as if sensing she needed friendly company. She was one of the last to get her kit and when she returned Sally-Anne could see “I 8888” on her left collar and “IIII” on her right. “Welcome to the Club, Sally-Anne,” Clarice said. “And don’t worry about a home. We’ll fix that as well.”

Maybe being magical would not be so bad, Sally-Anne thought.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE SORTING

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Sally-Anne Perks, who until a few weeks ago had never known that magic was real, was not the only one getting an education on the train. Harry and Hermione were as well. One might think it was an education in kissing, which they were doing when they thought no one was looking. The reality was they were learning just what “hiding in the open” had meant last year. Last year, the Club consisted almost exclusively of First through Fourth Years. Dora Tonks was the lone exception. The First Years (this year’s Second Years) included only about three who had been to Japan. About a third of those years were in the Club, although it varied by House. A quarter of the First through Fourth Year Slytherins were in the Club. Over two thirds of the same years’ Gryffindors were in the Club with Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff somewhere in between.

For the most part, the non-Club members took little or no notice of the Club and few asked questions. Aside from Slytherin, most who did not join felt the Club was going to take too much time away from other things. Slytherins, however, hated the Club. Then again, they seemed to hate anything and anyone not in or about Slytherin. That House was now effectively divided into two camps. The Club Slytherins were in one and the rest of their House in the other.

But, as Harry saw at Camp W, in Japan and most recently on the train, House did not matter. The Club seemed to be more important to its members than that, and that attitude included the Slytherin Situation. If a non-Club Slytherin had a go at any Club member, they had the whole Club ready to come after them. The non-Club Slytherins soon learned that the only thing more likely to earn them a lengthy time in the Hospital wing than bullying a Club Member was bullying a Slytherin Club Member. In either case, the Weasley boys made an example out of them no one wanted to emulate, but picking on Slytherin Club members earned even nastier retaliation. It seems Olivia was being quite serious about placing the Slytherin loos under the Fidelius Charm (provided Club Slytherins knew the secret.)

What shocked Hermione was the somewhat cavalier attitude the more senior Club members had about their Hogwarts school work. The ones who had been to Japan tended to skive off lessons and do the least amount of work possible on their homework. Yet, they all had done well enough on exams so as to not arouse undue suspicion. What these students did with their time was work on what they had learned in Japan and try and expand on that learning, which was something their classes could not offer and attending classes was a nuisance in their mind. They only did it because not doing so at all might expose the Club and end their “proper” education. The truth was, they were so far ahead of their years that it was not fair to those who did not have their opportunity for them to do their best.

“It would give us more time to work on other things we need to do,” Harry suggested. Hermione agreed, but the concept was against her nature.

Harry’s feet had barely touched the platform at Hogsmeade station when he heard a booming voice calling out “Firs’ Years this way!” He looked at a giant of a man approaching with a equally large beard that defined the word wild. Had Harry not known better, he might have been frightened of the large man.

“That must be Hagrid,” Hermione said as she took his hand beside him.

“Kinda hard to miss,” Harry nodded. “Should we say anything?”

“If we do we’ll have to mention Clarice,” Hermione began.

“What about me?” Clarice asked with Neville and Sally-Anne by her side.

“Just think we should wait until after sorting to give our regards to Hagrid,” Hermione said. “He might remember, you know.”

“Right in one,” Clarice agreed.

“Remember what?” Sally-Anne asked.

“Later,” Clarice said and the girl nodded not quite understanding. It was not long before all the First Years were assembled, after all the man’s voice was louder than normal and he was far bigger than normal.

“Right, this way t’ the boats,” he said after quite obviously counting heads and what looked like his fingers. He led them off on a path through a wood until they soon found themselves on the bank of what had to be a large lake. It was pitch dark out and aside from Hagrid’s lantern, the only other lights were on poles at the center of several small boats.

“Four to a boat,” Hagrid said. “An’ no more ‘en four,” he added with emphasis. “Don’ want none er you swimmin’ with th’ giant squid t’night.”

Harry, Hermione, Luna and Dean Thomas piled into one of the boats and Harry saw that Clarice, Neville, Sally-Anne and another kid were in the boat next to them. At some point Hagrid seemed to determine that the boats were ready and suggested they hang on and the little flotilla was soon gliding across still waters towards some as yet unseen shore.

The boats seemed to glide past some unseen point of land and before them rose a cliff atop which, lit by countless points of light, stood a towering castle the likes of which Harry had never seen. It was like something out of a fairy tale and made Windsor Castle and the Tower of London look like shacks in comparison. Despite everything he had read or heard and his years of magical education, the first sight of Hogwarts Castle left him speechless.

The boats soon passed into a cavern beneath the castle and came along a quay where they came to a halt and the students disembarked. They followed Hagrid up a flight of stairs and through a set of doors into a grand entry that reminded Harry a little of Westminster Abbey. Hagrid then led them to another, and thankfully much shorter flight of stairs.

The group of new first years climbed a set of stairs as indicated by the giant of a man who had escorted them across the back lake to the Castle. Awaiting them at the top was a tall witch dressed in deep green robes that appeared to have been made from some form of crushed velvet and that shimmered in the torch light which illuminated the hall. She wore square shaped eyeglasses and a severe expression and seemed to block the way forward. The group of students came to a halt. Half of whom had little or no idea who this woman was. Harry and the others knew full well. It was McGonagall.

“Welcome to Hogwarts,” she began. “I am Professor McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress and head of Gryffindor House. The welcoming feast is about to start, but first you must be sorted into your houses. They are: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin. While you are at this school, your houses will be like your homes. You will sleep in your House dormitories, eat at your House tables and attend classes with your house mates. Your triumphs will earn your House points. Any rule breaking will cost your House points. At the end of the year, the House with the most points wins the House Cup which is a great honor. Please remain here and I will come and collect you when we are ready.” With that, McGonagall left them and headed through a huge set of wooden double doors which closed behind her.

No sooner than the door had closed and Harry was standing face to face with a almost dwarf sized version of the man he had hexed at the station that morning. The boy was shorter than him by at least an inch, but held himself up with a bearing that screamed arrogance.

“It’s true then,” the boy announced as he was joined by two larger boys that could be best described as goons. One was a little taller than Harry, the other was shorter but both had obviously been allowed too much unsupervised access to cookie jars and sweet shops. “Harry Potter has come to Hogwarts.” Harry decided to look around as if he had no idea what the arrogant boy was on about.

“This is Crabbe and Goyle,” the annoying boy continued obviously indicating the lumps on either side of him. “And I am Malfoy, Draco Malfoy.”



Harry did his best not to laugh ... yet. Unfortunately, others were not as in control of their bemusement. The boy looked at them with either disdain or disgust, Harry decided more likely the latter.

“You will find, Potter, that some wizarding families are better than others. I can help you there.” Draco extended his hand.

“As a shining example of the others?” Harry quipped. “Sorry. I don’t do Death Eaters.” Draco flushed red when most of the students laughed at him. “Gonna be a fall down drunk like Daddy when you grow up?”

“What?” Draco asked indignantly and in surprise.

“All over the train how he passed out drunk at the station,” Harry said. “Bet you’re real proud of him.”

“He was hexed!” Draco said.

“Funny. No one else is saying that one.”

Draco looked like he might start something, not that Harry was worried. Although he did not want to cause any trouble that would bring unnecessary attention to himself or his friends, he figured Draco and his stooges would be lucky to last two seconds, and that was without Harry resorting to magic. Fortunately, a clearing of a throat from behind defused the situation.

“We are ready,” McGonagall said, glaring at Draco as he made his way back into the pack of students.

The students entered the Great Hall of Hogwarts and could see they were walking down an aisle between two sets of long tables, two on either side. The older students were already seated and eyeing the new students with at least some interest. Harry heard Hermione commenting to one of the Muggle Raised children that the ceiling was enchanted to look like it was not there and he looked up and saw that the arches seemed to disappear into the night sky. At the far end of the huge hall was a raised floor upon which was another long table

with a row of adults seated and waiting. It was obviously the faculty. Harry wondered who was who and especially which one was Quirrell. The only ones he recognized were Professors Sprout and Flitwick as they were affiliated with the Club, although he was certain the old man with the long white beard and odd looking robes had to be Dumbledore.

When they reached the front of the Hall between the students and faculty tables they stopped. McGonagall placed a tall wooden stool just in front of the faculty table and an old, battered, wide brimmed hat upon it. The hat was tall and pointed and looked like it had seen better days about a million years ago or so, Harry thought. No sooner than McGonagall had let go of the hat and it seemed to tear in two and then began to ... sing?

Harry really did not pay attention to the song. He got the gist of it. The Hat was made by the Founders to sort the students picking the ones the Founders would have chosen for their Houses in its stead. Gryffindor sought the brave, Ravenclaw the studious and Slytherin the cunning with the leftovers going to Huffelpuff, it seemed. Harry felt that was more than a little condescending, but he was not here to critique either the music which was odd if not off key or the lyrics. Fortunately, the Hat kept it short and seemed to repair itself once it deemed itself finished.

As it sang, Harry remembered the conversation he had with his friends about the Sorting. They all agreed that until the events played out, the timeline had to be preserved as much as possible. That meant that Harry, Hermione and Neville had to be Gryffindors just as they had been in Sensei's time. The question marks were Luna and Clarice as neither were part of this story yet, and the other Clarice never was. They also decided that if possible the group should be kept together. Sensei had told them the Hat had desperately wanted to sort that other Harry into Slytherin, but abided by that Harry's wish to be sorted elsewhere. Perhaps it could be told where to place people if they desired? There was only one way to find out.

"Now," McGonagall said, "when I call your name you will come up here and take a seat upon this stool. I will then place the Sorting Hat upon your head and you'll be sorted into your Houses."

“I’m gonna kill my brothers,” Harry heard Ron say. “Not that I was worried, but they said they had to wrestle a troll.”

“Abbott, Hannah!” McGonagall called out.

Harry watched as Hannah Abbott walked up to the stool. The blonde haired girl was a member of the Club and had already completed her first summer in Japan passing her O.W.L.s. Part of Harry was nervous for this was the first time a Watanabe student had faced the Sorting Hat of Hogwarts. He wondered whether the hat would announce the truth about her and by extension the rest of them. Hannah sat upon the stool and the hat was lowered upon her head. It seemed to take forever before anything happened.

“Huffelpuff!” the Hat announced finally. Harry could see he was not the only one who sighed in relief. Hannah jumped off the stool and instead of heading directly over to her new table, she headed to the crowd of waiting first years and received quiet congratulations from other Club members before finally heading to her table. Fortunately, McGonagall said nothing. As soon as Hannah headed off to find a seat, McGonagall continued.

The question in Harry’s mind now was what would happen when the Hat was placed upon Susan’s head. She had already spent three summers in Japan, after all. She was already years beyond what Hogwarts could offer and arguably could teach any of the classes she would now be taking. She was, after all, well beyond her N.E.W.T.s having earned Masteries in Defense and Charms and was currently working towards a six year Mastery in Wand Making. Again, the Hat seemed to take forever before sending Susan off to join Hannah at the Huffelpuff table. Hermione would be the next test, Harry thought.

By the time Hermione’s name was called, Huffelpuff had also gained the Muggle Born Justin Finch-Fletchley and a boy named Wayne Hopkins. Club members Lavender Brown and Seamus Finnegan were the first Gryffindors. Ravenclaw had received Club members Terry Boot and Mandy Brocklehurst, Muggle Borns Michael Corner and Anthony Goldstein and two other boys named Steven Cornfoot

and Kevin Entwhistle whom Harry learned were Purebloods of supremacist families. Slytherin had received Club Members Millicent Bulstrode and Tracy Davis. Ron had told Millie after she was sorted that he was still her best friend which earned a smile from the clearly disappointed girl. They were joined by two Death Eater sons: Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle, both of whom looked even dumber than their reputations.

“Granger, Hermione,” McGonagall called out and Harry could swear the woman almost smiled as his girlfriend walked up to be sorted.

Hermione sat upon the stool as the Hat was placed upon her head.

“Aha!” a voice called out in her head, “I see I have one of those who have made this year’s sorting so ... interesting. How very Slytherin convincing so many to forego a Hogwarts education...”

“Gryffindor,” Hermione thought back. “Slytherins would never think of that. For themselves, maybe. For others? Some would. Most would not. What we did fits more with Gryffindor.”

“Indeed? And yet it is I who decides where you fit.”

“Gryffindor,” she replied forcefully.

“I think not,” the Hat began.

“As magical heir of Rowena Ravenclaw, your thoughts are not my concern. You will place me in Gryffindor as you had my ancestors or I and my fellow Heirs will see you to your new home in a rubbish bin!”

“Again, very Slytherin of you, young lady.”

“Gryffindor!”

“Just what is a Spell Crafter doing on this chair,” the Hat challenged.

“That is my business and not yours! Place me in Gryffindor!”

“As you wish,” the Hat sighed. “GRYFFINDOR!” it called out.

“Cannot believe I had to argue with a hat,” Hermione whispered as she passed the others on the way to the Gryffindor table.

Club member Daphne Greengrass was next and, while not surprised, she did seem disappointed to be sent to Slytherin House.

“Jameson, Clarice,” Professor McGonagall called out.

Harry looked up at the Heads Table at Dumbledore as his sister stepped forward. He wondered whether the old man would react to that name and saw no reaction whatsoever. He could tell the man’s occlumancy shields were at a minimum which told him that it seemed Dumbledore made no connection with the name Clarice and anything else. One day the man would be in for a bit of a shock, he smirked as he watched the Hat being lowered upon Clarice’s head.

“Interesting,” the Hat said to Clarice. “Dumbledore must be losing his touch not to have said anything about your being here, young lady.”

“Excuse me?” Clarice thought back.

“The man has a nasty habit of talking to himself when he is alone,” the Hat replied. “The sister of Harry Potter was not supposed to attend Hogwarts. He thinks he had seen to that. Then again, you’re not really attending, are you? By all rights you should still be at home playing with dolls, not off to a school. And yet you’re a fully qualified Healer and all that. Were I curious, I would wonder what you are doing here, but I am not. Not really. None of my business as one of your ‘classmates’ so clearly told me. Guess I should put the lot of you troublemakers together...” “GRYFFINDOR!” the Hat called out.

The Muggle Borns Megan Jones and Su Li were sorted into Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw respectively before the next name of interest to Harry and the Club was called.

“Longbottom, Neville,” McGonagall called out. Neville stepped forward and was promptly sorted into Gryffindor as he had been in the other timeline, although Harry seemed to recall Sensei mentioning it took the Hat a while with the other Neville.

“Lovegood, Luna,” McGonagall called.

Again, Harry watched to see if there was any reaction from Dumbledore. And again, for whatever reason there was not any. Harry was almost certain there would be as both of Luna’s parents were former students, but then again part of him doubted that the old man paid attention to such things as birthdays and Luna was, after all, only three weeks younger than the normal cut off for this year. He then watched as Luna walked up to the stool and as usual seemed to be the least affected by the experience of anyone. The hat was placed upon her head.

“My my,” the Hat said, “seems we have us a little conspiracy!”

“Hello Mr. Hat,” Luna replied.

“Hello indeed. Yet another with far more between her ears than she ought. One might think that there is a plot to render this valuable school irrelevant?”

“Not the school, Mr. Hat, just the education.”

“Indeed?”

“Oh yes, and it’s not your fault the adults fear to teach what they should. That ignorance arose long after the Founders.”

“I should say so,” the Hat replied, “so you do not trust the adults of this time to see to your future?”

“Some yes,” Luna replied, “most no. The ones who say what we can and cannot learn deserve no trust for trust is earned by trusting and they trust no one.”

“Well spoken! A Ravenclaw if ever I heard of one.’

“Ah yes, ‘Wit without measure is man’s greatest treasure.’ Simplistic and incomplete, don’t you think Mr. Hat? Knowledge for knowledge’s sake is wasted. What is knowledge without the wisdom and courage to use it properly? From wisdom one also learns when knowledge should not be used. A Ravenclaw would not see the difference, would they?”

“I suppose not,” the Hat agreed. “Yet such wisdom is a Ravenclaw trait?”

“Intellect is and intellect alone is not wisdom, Mr. Hat. I should think Gryffindor is the place for me.”

“And why should a keen mind like yours be wasted upon such a House?”

“We can begin with the fact that the keenest mind in this Hall is already in that House...”

“There were extenuating circumstances...”

“Ah! She told you to under her authority as Ravenclaw’s magical heir.”

“Erm...”

“Then you have already learned that what the heir wants in such regard she gets?”

“Don’t tell me...”

“Magical heir of Helga Hufflepuff and Gryffindor shall be my House I should think, Mr. Hat.”

“Trying to tell me my job?”

“Oh no. I have not said a word to you about where I think any others belong, but I belong with my friends.”

“Gryffindor,” the Hat said, although it seemed a little surly when it said it.

As Luna passed Harry she said: “That one’s got an attitude, it does.”

Harry watched as the sorting continued. The next student called to the stool was Draco Malfoy who had already made such an impression. The boy looked smug and Harry sincerely hoped the Hat would sort him into Huffelpuff to knock him down several pegs but doubted that would happen. It was a pity he had to be sent anywhere but home. The Hat barely touched the boy’s head before saying “Slytherin.”

A girl by the name of Morag McDougal was next and Harry could swear he heard Malfoy say the word “mudblood” as he and the Muggle Born girl passed each other. It was obvious she had either not heard him or not understood the expression. She was sorted into Ravenclaw.

The next two students were bound for Huffelpuff. Club member Ernie McMillan headed for the table just ahead of a girl named Lilith Moon. Club member Theo Nott was next and as he had suspected, the Hogwarts W.I.S.E. Junior League Keeper was headed off to the Slytherin table where Harry was certain he saw Theo smack Malfoy in the back of the head. He was followed by another Slytherin, Pansy Parkinson. They were now into the “P’s” and next up were the Patil twins who were also in the Club. Padma was sorted into Ravenclaw and any belief that siblings were destined to the same House was dashed when Padma’s twin sister Parvati was sorted into Gryffindor. The next was a very scared looking Muggle Born witch named Sally-Anne Perks who found herself also destined to the Gryffindor table.

“Potter, Harry,” McGongall called. Harry walked up noting that for the first time Dumbledore seemed to be taking an interest in what was going on. He turned his back to the man and sat facing the



students as all the others before him had done and the Hat was lowered onto his head.

“And now, one might say, the circle is complete?” the Hat began.

“Odd choice of words,” Harry replied.

“You seem to be the key to this puzzle and yet you are not.”

“Puzzle?”

“Half the students so far it seems are well beyond where they should be magically and you, like others, well beyond even that.”

“So?”

“It has been hard to place them. Their minds are too advanced to sort by my usual means as I usually evaluate the blank canvass, not the portrait in progress or the final work, as it seems you are. The more you learn and experience, the more you can fit in any House.”

“And in my case?”

“Slytherin is strong,” the Hat began.

“But it is not where you’ll place me.”

“Oh? And why not? Your plan shows cunning and ambition.”

“For others as well as myself,” Harry replied. “While I know Slytherins who are generous souls, they are more likely to act in their own self interest than some.”

“True, and that is not always a bad thing.”

“And yet that House has become the bastion of bigotry and hate,” Harry accused. “It was not that way once upon a time, was it?”

“No. It was not. Perhaps placing you there would change it?”

“ I will not grace that House with my presence. It is an embarrassment to my ancestors. You will place me in the House of my other ancestor, Godric Gryffindor.”

“Other? Are you saying you are the magical heir of both?”

“You are saying it, but I am not denying it.”

“The four founders heirs are here?”

“We are, and you will note half of us are where I should be. You know the Legend, fulfill your duty!”

“Gryffindor,” the Hat called out. When Harry finally took his seat next to Hermione he looked up at the Head Table and was a little annoyed that Dumbledore was smiling at him and once again ignoring the rest of the sorting.

Harry watched as the rest of the sorting continued uneventfully. Club member Zach Smith joined a boy named Josh Roper as the last two Huffelpuffs. Club member Lisa Turpin became the last Ravenclaw. A girl from a Death Eater family named Augusta Runcorn and a boy named Blaise Zabini closed out the Slytherin selection and Club members Dean Thomas and Ron Weasley became the last Gryffindors.

“No worries,” Ron said with a smile as he sat down.

“And just what might you have been worried about?” Clarice asked.

“Er – not being in Gryffindor?” he replied.

“Like that would ever happen,” Harry chuckled. “Seems your family owns this House.”

“I suppose,” Ron said. He did not really believe that, but there was the fact that he was the sixth Weasley sorted into the House in the last decade or so.

Harry saw that Dumbledore had risen from his seat at the center of the faculty table.

“Welcome to another year at Hogwarts,” he began, “and to our new First Years and friends, welcome. A few words before we settle down to our feast. And they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Thank you and enjoy.” As the man sat down, the tables filled with piles of food and Harry and the other First Years followed the example of the older students and began filling their plates with all sorts of food.

“Is Dumbledore a bit off?” Harry asked turning to Percy Weasley who was seated beside him.

“Dumbledore?” Percy replied. “I suppose. He’s been like that for ages though. Mum and Dad thought he was a right nutter when they were here. But he’s supposed to be brilliant as well ... and dangerous.”

“I did get that about him from others,” Harry said as he began to fill his plate.

“Don’t forget vegetables,” Hermione reminded him.

“Yes Dear,” Harry said rolling his eyes as carrots, beans and asparagus found their way to his plate beside the beef, chicken and potatoes.

“So Percy,” Harry continued, “I mean I know a few up there, but whose the staff?”

“Ah,” Percy replied. “Well, let’s start from our right, shall we? First off there’s Rubeus Hagrid. He’s Keeper of Keys and Grounds, whatever that is. Been here forever. They say he’s third or fourth longest in tenure depending upon whether you include Professor Binns.”

“Binns?”

“Magical History. Poor bloke was teaching it over a hundred years ago and died at his desk, at least his body did. The ghost keeps teaching as if nothing happened. Bloody useless really since if it happened after about 1850 it's not known to him and he does not teach it.”

“Lot's happened since then,” Harry offered.

Percy nodded. “Yet you wouldn't learn it from him. He's all on about the Goblin Wars which ended over two hundred years ago. Thanks to you lot, I've had a proper history class and now find his class is a good place for a kip.”

“And Hagrid?” Harry asked.

“Scariest looking,” Percy said, “and living proof one should not judge a book by its cover. You will never meet a more gentle soul. If you would aspire to be like anyone here, he is the one to emulate. Man has nothing, yet is the most generous person you will ever meet. He's been beaten down by life and bigotry, yet he accepts people for who they really are inside. Nothing against McGonagall, whom I think highly of, but you want the ideal person, it's Hagrid. I only wish I knew him better than I do...”

“Percy?”

“Don't get me wrong, Harry. I love the bloke. But it was my brother Charlie who really was taken under his wing. Hagrid's passion, aside from being a great guy, is magical creatures and Charlie loved that class. Pity it's not Hagrid teaching. He'd be on staff where we went. The man has a gift for that. Got Charlie his dream job, Hagrid did.”

“Oh?”

“A few older students who were tight with Hagrid and into magical creatures work for a dragon reserve in Romania. Charlie's there now.”

Mum had kittens when she found that out, but she thinks the world of Hagrid too, so..."

"Erm ... how might I get to know him?"

"Easy enough. Just pop by for tea. I do now and then. Others do as well. Just steer clear of his Rock Cakes."

"Rock Cakes?"

"I'm almost sure they are cake, but the name fits. Hard as rock they are. But the time is well spent. Pity the man is not our Care of Magical Creatures prof..."

"Why?"

"Hagrid knows that stuff. As I think I said, he would be on staff where we were. Might even be Head of Department there. Instead..."

"Instead?"

"Man seated next to Hagrid. Horatio Kettleburn. Been on staff even longer than Hagrid and by rights should be Deputy but does not want the job."

Harry looked and saw a man who seemed to be more scared than any person he had ever seen.

"Been through a meat grinder?" Harry asked.

Percy nodded. "In a manner of speaking. Man's claim to fame is he's been mauled by just about every magical creature imaginable. Only ones he's not gotten at least a scar from are basilisks, manticores and chimeras."

"Hardly inspires confidence," Harry noted.

“No,” Percy agreed. “Rather have Hagrid, were it up to me. That one’s now afraid of his own shadow. Won’t even bring a nice creature into a class. He runs from post owls, if you must know.”

“Again,” Harry said, “hardly encouraging.”

“Next is Madam Hooch,” Percy continued. “She teaches broom flying and is our referee for House Quidditch. Then there’s Madam Pomphrey. She’s our school Healer. You lot ever come out, I am sure she’d love to meet Clarice.”

“Clarice wishes to maintain her practice,” Harry said. “She’s planning on doing weekends.”

“From what I’ve heard,” Percy replied, “this school would benefit from her active participation in Healing here. Just a thought.”

“I’ve heard the same,” Clarice said. She was sitting across from Harry and listening intently. “And I would agree. But coming out might be an issue.”

Percy nodded. “It might right now. Hopefully...”

“Hopefully,” Clarice agreed and returned to her meal.

“Next is Professor Vector,” Percy said. “Teaches Arithmancy and might have made faculty where we were. His course it not as stunted as others. Then there’s Professor Sinestra. She teaches Astronomy. It’s old school. She’d probably have kittens to have access to that Muggle space telescope or even its images. You know Professor Sprout, of course.”

Harry nodded.

“She could teach there as well. She’s top of her field in Europe and ... well as she is Club, I do hope she can go and spend time there next summer. She’ll be so thrilled.”

“I’m told the offer is out there,” Harry said. “McGonagall said she’s in.”

Percy nodded. “On the other side of Dumbledore and McGonagall is Professor Savant. Ancient Runes, although she seems to know nothing about non-European runes. Then there’s Professor Babbage. She’s new and teaches Muggle Studies. Knows nothing about Muggles really. You know Professor Flitwick, of course?”

Harry nodded. “You were there for our duel.”

Percy nodded. “He said dealing with you and the other upper level Watanabe crowd was the first challenge he’s had in ages.”

“He got his ass handed to him a few times,” Harry observed.

“And told us club types it was a good reminder that one cannot sit on their laurels,” Percy replied. “Next is Professor Quirrell,” he began.

Harry looked at the man wearing the turban on his head and momentarily thought about the fact that this was the man he had to kill or see to it that the man was killed.

“Don’t know what he’s teaching,” Percy said. “Used to be our Muggle Studies Professor. Next is Professor Snape. Everyone knows he wants the Defense job, but he’s the only Potions Master so he’s stuck with that unless Quirrell somehow attained that Mastery during the last year. My guess is he did not. Snape’s been after the DADA post practically since he started here from what I’ve heard. Snape is Head of Slytherin and hates just about anything and anyone not Slytherin. Hates us Gryffindors in particular, he does. A sneeze will cost us ten points in this class. Nasty bugger. Anyway, next to Snape is Professor Trelawney. She usually never shows up to meals. Teaches Divination although if she ever had a predictions of magical merit, I’d be surprised.”

“Anyone missing?” Harry asked.

“Well, there’s Madam Pince the Librarian,” Percy said. “Between you and me, I think she hates people in general and anyone who would dare touch a book in particular.”

“What kind of Librarian would think that,” Hermione asked as she was next to Harry and had been listening intently.

“Only ours, I should hope,” Percy sighed. “She never attends these things. And no one wants the school caretaker Filch around so he and his familiar Mrs. Norris are absent, thank Merlin.”

“And the familiar? What’s that?” Hermione asked.

“A cat. Bloody annoying beast. The twins are working on a cat booby trap for it.”

“I have a cat!” Hermione complained.

“A Gryffindor cat,” Percy said. “Filch is a squib and the Twins trap should not affect a witches cat, Hermione.”

“Why would you want to - erm - affect his?”

“Filch is a pain in our backside, Hermione,” Percy replied. “If anyone would put a kink in our pranking, he and his bloody cat would. The man lives for it.”

Percy soon was involved with his meal and Harry began to eat as well. As he did, he looked up to the Head Table and at the man he might well have to kill sometime that year. Professor Quirrell seemed nervous and looked out of place with the large turban on his head. If there was anyone who looked least like a vessel for Voldemort, it was that man.

Harry chose not to look at either Dumbledore or Snape. This was not because he knew they were supposedly accomplished in the mind arts. Harry was as well and knew there was no way either of them could attempt to see his thoughts from where they were. Were they to try, even with the greatest of concentration, they would fail. There



were too many people between Harry for them to get any kind of read on Harry, or anyone of the other students for that matter. All they could hope to get was a confused buzz from the many minds in the Hall. He chose not to look at them as part of the act. After all, he supposedly had no idea who they were or why they might be of any import to him.

At what was about the mid point of the meal, the ghosts of Hogwarts arrived. Harry had heard about them from Sirius and others. They were interesting in their own way, and Harry was convinced that Sir Nicholas was probably the most sociable of the group. (Although the Hufflepuffs might beg to differ as the Fat Friar was his usual boisterous self). The Grey Lady of Ravenclaw and Bloody Baron of Slytherin House never said a word as near as Harry could tell.

After what seemed like a long time, and well after Harry had eaten his treacle tart and was certain he could not stuff another morsel into himself, McGonagall tapped her goblet to get the attention of the students. Harry and the other looked up and saw Dumbledore rise from his chair.

“Well then,” Dumbledore began, “now that we are properly fed and watered, I have a few announcements to make.

“First of all, I would like you to welcome back Professor Quirrell. Many of you older students may recall he taught Muggle Studies. Well after a most satisfying sabbatical, he has agreed to assume the post as Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts. Professor Quirrell.”

The man in the odd looking turban arose from his seat to a scattered applause. As soon as the applause died down, he sat back down.

“Next, for our new students, you will learn that when you are not scheduled for class or meals, your time is your own. As such and in fair whether, you like all students may spend such time outside on the school grounds. However, First Years will note that the Forbidden Forest is off limits to all students. And a few of our older students are reminded that rule applies to them as well.

“Our caretaker Mr. Filch has asked me to remind you that magic is not to be done in the corridors. He also wishes to remind you that there are many magical items that are also banned and there is a complete list of such items on the door to his office.

“Those of you interest in trying out for your House Quiddich teams must sign up with either their head of house or team Captain by the end of the week. Again, I must remind our First Years that they are not ordinarily selected to play and may wish to put off trying out until second year when they are allowed their own brooms.

“All students should note that the Third Floor Corridor on the right hand side is off limits to all who wish to avoid a most painful death.

“Finally, due to the resignation of our Minister for Magic this past week, my duties as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot shall consume most of my time for the foreseeable future and I will only be present here at Hogwarts one day a week, barring a situation that absolutely demands my presence. Professor McGonagall shall be acting in my stead until such time as a new Minister is selected.

“Now, before we head off to our beds, let us conclude our evening with the school song.”

Harry and the other first years had no idea what the words were and it was obvious from the first “note” that no one had any idea as to the melody or even the key. It seemed every student who did sing sang something different with the Weasley twins choosing what best could be described as a slow funeral dirge that ensured they were the last to finish. Once the song was done, Percy called to the Gryffindor First Years to follow him and in a line, the eleven new Gryffindors followed Percy from the Great Hall.

Percy led them up several flight of stairs at a fairly slow pace as he seemed to know that the new students would dawdle as they took in the sights. For Harry, Hermione and Clarice, it was their first time seeing magical portraits. There apparently were not any at Potter House and if there were any at Black Manor, they had not seen them.

The talking and moving portraits were actually rather amusing, although Percy did warn the students that the portraits were not above reporting student misbehavior to the faculty. Finally, they reached a portrait of a corpulent woman dressed in a style that probably went out of fashion two centuries earlier.

“This is the entry to Gryffindor tower,” Percy explained. “To enter, you need to know the password. For now it’s ‘Caput Draconis.’” Upon speaking the words, the portrait opened outward revealing a passageway. Harry and the others followed Percy through into the large room beyond.

The room was filled with chairs and couches and already some of the older students were lounging about. On one wall was a huge fireplace and a fire was already burning within the hearth.

“This is the Gryffindor Common Room. There is a curfew at ten o’clock every evening at which time you must be here or up in your dormitories. There is no curfew within Gryffindor tower, but unless you are with a Prefect or faculty member, if you are out of our tower after curfew, it will cost points and detentions if you are caught. That being said, boys dormitories are up the stairs to the left and girls the same to the right. Your things are already in your rooms.

“You may leave the tower after five-thirty in the morning. Breakfast begins in the Great Hall at six-thirty and continues until ten minutes before nine o’clock. Ordinarily, you are not required to attend breakfast. However, tomorrow morning all of you must be there to receive your class schedules. That’s all.”

With that the First Years began to look around or head for the stairs.

“ Oh,” Percy continued and they all stopped. “I need to see Hermione Granger, Clarice Jameson, Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood and Harry Potter. The rest of you can do as you like.”

“In trouble already,” Seamus Finnegan said.

“Don’t think so,” Hermione replied as the five went over to Percy.

“What’s going on?” Harry asked.

“Dora Tonks said there would be a meeting tonight in the Club Corridor, did she not?” Percy replied. “As you lot are very senior Club members, you’re to be there as well. Follow me.”

Percy then led the five back through the portrait.

Snape was somewhat lost in thought as he stared at his lesson plans for the next day. McGonagall had been far too kind with the scheduling, he thought. He would not have to see the useless First Years for Potions until Thursday and then only one day a week. True, it was a double period in the morning with Slytherins and those insufferable Gryffindors and a double in the afternoon with the rest. He hated double periods almost as much as the students did. But, better that than seeing whose whelps two days a week, he thought. And now Potter was there. The brat looked so much like his pathetic excuse of a father and was probably just as arrogant. Well, arrogance could be dealt with.

A knock at the door to his suite broke him from beginning to plot against the son of his school day nemesis.

“Enter,” he said. The door opened and a short, blonde haired boy entered. Snape knew the boy at once: Draco Malfoy. Snape had been friends with the boy’s mother Narcissa since they were First Years together. He had little use for the boy’s father who he felt was both reckless and arrogant, two traits he loathed in people. It was such a pity a lovely woman like Cissy had to be matched with such a man, but that was the way of the wealthy Purebloods. As annoying as Lucius Malfoy was, he was rich. That was not a condition Snape could claim, which was the main reason why he had never married. A Pureblood match with the right family was not in the cards for a Half Blood Potions Professor. There was also the little problem that he had actually been in love once. Annoying, that was. But she was his life until she betrayed him and married that damnable Potter. Still, he never lost his feelings for her. Not even now, ten years after his own stupidity cost her her life.

“Mr. Malfoy,” Snape drawled, “is there some reason why you feel necessary to absent yourself from your common room and interrupt my preparation?”

“Sorry, Godfather,” Draco began.

“In this setting, you shall address me as Professor or Professor Snape. Am I clear?”

“Yes - er - Professor.”

“Now, what brings a First Year to his Head of House so late in the evening?”

“I need to talk to you, Professor.”

“My door is not open to social calls, Mr. Malfoy. Unless this is related to school, your presence and need are not my concern.”

“Something happened on the train,” Draco shot back. “Surely that’s school stuff!”

Snape shook his head. The boy was too much like his father and not nearly enough like his mother. That could get him into trouble one day. Maybe even today? “And what happened that needs my attention, Mr. Malfoy?”

“There were attacks.”

“Indeed? Hexing aboard the train is hardly out of the common experience. Is there some reason why I should need to know?”

“Someone hexed my father in the back!”

“Did you see who this someone was?”

“No, but...”

“Was he aboard the train when he was hexed?”

“No. The platform, but...”

“The platform is none of my or the schools concern, Mr. Malfoy. Is that all?”

“But I’m pretty sure someone on the train did it!” Malfoy yelled.

“Do not use that tone with me, Mr. Malfoy. Now did you see this someone?”

“No but...”

“Did you actually see the hex?”

“No but ...”

“So you are merely speculating that the hex was from the train. Is that not correct?”

“I suppose, but...”

“Mr. Malfoy, the matter is not my concern. You are aware that as a convicted Death Eater your father has more than a few enemies, any one of whom would hex him as soon as look at him?”

Draco nodded reluctantly.

“I cannot understand what possessed your father to expose himself at all. I understand this was your first trip here, but that is no reason to risk one’s personal safety needlessly. He should have stayed at home.”

“He wanted to see Lord Black!”

“Indeed? Why would he want to do that?”

“To get me my rights back!”

“I see. You honestly think Lord Black is about to reinstate you? He disowned you and others to break all ties between House Black and the Death Eaters. I doubt he would change his mind...unless your father was fool enough to attempt the Imperious Curse.”

Draco looked nervous.

“He would have been caught. He would have been sent to prison and he no longer has the political capital to avoid a life sentence, Draco. It was a foolish thing to do and given that you are not in the immediate line of succession, nothing would have come of it anyway.”

“Father does not think the Black Estate should pass to a Blood Traitor!”

“And you agree?”

Draco nodded.

“I see. Mr. Malfoy, whether you or your father like it or not, those days are over! You may have already noticed that the attitudes your father cherishes are no longer tolerated here. It’s not just Hogwarts, Mr. Malfoy. Being a known Death Eater or wanting those days to return can only cause one to come to grief.”

“But you were!”

“Indeed. And how often do you think I leave the relative safety of Hogwarts or my home? I don’t. I have not been to either Hogsmeade Village or Diagon Alley since 1981. I know better than to be in public and perhaps your father should do likewise.”

“So we’re supposed to hide?”

Snape shook his head. "You are supposed to keep your head down and not attract the wrong kind of attention. This attitude of yours suggests you already have failed in that regard. Am I not correct?"

Draco remained silent.

"I am aware, Mr. Malfoy, that Slytherin Prefects found it necessary to hex you on the train. You mind telling me why? And don't lie, for I shall know and now that you are sorted, I will take points!"

"I was reminding some kids of their place in our world."

"I see. As in bullying Muggle Borns?"

"They have no business..."

"SILENCE! That attitude is not allowed and you should know that. You pull that kind of stunt here, and you may well be on the next train home. Do I make myself clear?"

"But..."

"AM I CLEAR?"

"Yes Professor," the kid said clearly hating it.

"Now go to your dormitory."

"Yes Professor." Draco said as he turned to leave. He could not believe Snape was not about to stand up for him and put those Mudbloods and Blood Traitors in their place.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE HOGWARTS CLUB

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Percy led Harry and the others through the castle in what was probably the most direct route to their destination, wherever that was, but it was still filled with enough turns to get them all confused. Even Hermione, who was using one of the magical maps of the school (one that showed them where they were and how to get around as opposed to the ones that also showed where everyone else was), was a little disoriented. They finally arrived at a portrait of two wizards playing chess.

“So, where are we Percy?” Harry asked.

“Fifth Floor, the abandoned North Wing,” Percy replied. “This is the entrance to the Club Corridor.

“Abandoned?” Clarice asked.

“Several centuries ago, before the other schools were around or widely known, Hogwarts had a lot more students than today. Today, we’re less than half the size of what we once were and obviously don’t need all the space that a school for over a thousand students needs. This wing was shut off ages ago and we – er – reclaimed it for the Club.”

“The whole wing?” Neville asked.

“Well, that was the plan,” Percy said. “Currently, we have access to this floor and the Fourth and Sixth Floors. While you can exit from any floor, this is the only entrance. We were hoping to claim the lower floors as well, but Dumbledore’s using the Third Floor for some sort of project.”

“That’s the one he said is off limits?” Hermione asked.

“Yep,” Percy said. “We’d complain, but as this Club is somewhat secret we decided it best not to. Besides, we have more space than we need as it is. Come on then.”

Percy turned to the Wizards Playing Chess and said: “God Save the Queen.” The portrait slid to the left revealing a large door behind it. Percy opened the door and led the others in.

“God Save the Queen?” Harry asked.

“Password,” Percy said. “Our biggest threat is from Pureblood Supremacists and their ilk. You’d never catch them saying that. It’s way too respectful of Muggles.”

“Still, a password is,” Hermione began.

“Not the only precaution,” Percy said as the door closed behind them. “The password works only in conjunction with a charmed object that is keyed to its proper owner. Even if someone like Snape were to get one from a Student, it would not work for him.”

“Sounds ingenious,” Clarice said.

“Fred and George came up with the added feature last year. Course, we had to change the object.”

“Why?”

“Last year we used charmed Sickles and Knuts. They were also real ones and had a nasty habit of accidentally getting spent during Hogsmeade Weekends.”

“So what are we using now?” Hermione asked.

“Those collar devices we passed out on the train. They have the same Charm on them and have the added advantage of not being confused for money.”

“What’s to stop someone from just taking these and using it to gain access?”

“They are keyed to the person. If two of you swapped your collar devices, you would not be able to get in here at all.”

“Seems like an awful lot of security,” Harry mused. “I mean while it’s true that this Club probably pushes the borders of legality in this country, but I’d be more concerned with what people say in the classes and common rooms than what goes on here.”

“That is a potential problem,” Percy said. “Everyone pretty much keeps shut about it around non-members and those of us who’ve been to Japan can always talk in Japanese if we need to. I can assure you that no one else here knows a word of that language. We could be talking gibberish for all they know.”

“I always wondered what a Gibber was,” Luna said.

“What?”

“A Gibber. Whatever creature or people that speak Gibberish.”

Her four friends laughed along with Luna. Percy looked confused.

“Is she serious?” he asked.

“It’s hard to tell,” Harry said. “After all, her father is the owner and editor of The Quibbler.”

“I can assure you,” Luna said, “that every story in my Daddy’s paper is at least plausible, if you assume there’s any factual basis for it.” Again, it was hard to tell if she was joking or not. Percy decided it best not to comment.

“Anyway,” he said, “This floor is our main meeting area. We have some study rooms and such here as well as well as our Club Center, which I’ll show you in a bit. Fourth Floor has been configured for

physical fitness, martial arts and magical dueling. Sixth Floor has our Potions Lab and six classrooms we use for tutorials, study and the like.”

“Seems like a lot,” Hermione said.

Percy shrugged. “We now have almost a hundred students in the Club, all of whom are years ahead of where they are supposed to be. To be honest, classes are boring. So, we spend as much time as we can here learning advanced stuff and helping the others. Basically, most Club Members spend most of their free time here once classes start. Slytherins spend all their time here and would live here if they could.”

“Why?”

“You will find that most of the Slytherins who are not in the Club are not the nicest of people. In addition to being mean spirited, they are also not the brightest. Olivia says that hanging out in the Slytherin Common Room sucks the intelligence out of you. If you ask me, they just want to be around their friends and not the thugs whom the Sorting Hat selected as house mates.”

“Could they?” Harry asked.

“Could they what?”

“Live here if they had to?”

“Really isn’t much of a need,” Percy replied. “The Club Members now all have a year in Japan and are more than a match for the other Snakes. The only chance those Snakes have is if they gang up on our Snakes. Course, if they do that, they’ll have the entire Club after them. Most of them might not be bright, but they know when the odds are stacked against them

“Still, yes they could live in this wing. There are two towers that you can access from this floor that used to be dormitories. I think one was Gryffindor and the other Ravenclaw...”

“But what about our tower?” Neville asked.

“Remember, there was a time when there were almost three times as many students here as there are today. Also, for centuries the boys and girls lived in totally separate dormitories and, as I understand it, attended classes separately. That changed a little over two hundred and fifty years ago or so and the extra towers were soon closed off. But we do have enough dormitory space for just about the whole Club. The towers are still closed off, but we could open them if needed.”

“Why are they closed off?” Hermione asked.

“McGonagall says we don’t need them now and is concerned that if they were opened... Well, there are a fair few teenage boys and girls who might take advantage of access to privacy.”

“Given the frequent use of the Time Chamber,” Clarice said, “I’d say they make do as is.”

“Which is why they don’t need more options,” Percy said. “Then again, not one member of the Club has ever been associated with that aspect of this school.”

“I should hope not,” Clarice said. “I find it almost criminal what our supposed elders have come to tolerate and it’s all because their attitudes about education are such that unless your parents teach you about what the consequences of your actions are, you won’t learn it here or at any of our other schools. And then, to effectively allow the people to avoid the full consequences of their youthful indiscretions is absurd! Add to the problem that there are generations of “Muggle Borns” who are anything but that since they are sent to live there from birth and... It’s horrid what they do just so they don’t have to abandon their antiquated view of things.”

“Or have their blood lines and lines of succession not to their liking,” Hermione said. “As I understand it, that was the main reason for their policy regarding underage child bearing. Before the Chamber, if a girl

got into that kind of trouble, she and her boyfriend had to marry regardless of whether she was actually promised to another. Ruined all the Pureblood plans, it did.”

“ Well,” Percy said, “call it what you will, but according to McGonagall, there was a thirty percent drop in the productivity from the Hogwarts Baby Factory last year. And don’t complain too much. The ongoing Time Chamber crisis and now the need to select a new Minister for Magic have kept Dumbledore from prying into the Club.”

Percy led the group to a door. “While our biggest secret is obviously Japan,” he began, “we do have others we wish to be kept from prying eyes.” Percy opened the door and they entered a small room with a wall lined with filing cabinets and a large table with three students seated there.

“For lack of a better word,” Percy said, “this is our communications center. We stopped using owls to communicate with the other schools when this began working.”

“You talk to them?” Harry asked.

“No. Still write. Voice communications is something we are working on, but for now we’d have to use the Floo and those are controlled. But, the Twins came up with a work around based upon something the original Marauders came up with years ago. Now those guys invented it to pass notes in class without getting caught. The Twins made it into something useful. Let me show you.”

He led them to the table. “On the right is a charmed scroll of parchment. We use that to send messages to the other schools. On the left is another charmed scroll where we receive messages. Whatever we write on the sending scroll automatically appears on all of the receiving scrolls. The other schools have this too, so we can write back and forth and such. It’s almost instantaneous as the message is received as fast as it’s written. We keep copies of all messages by sender and distribute copies as needed. As you can see, we’re already in business.”

The group looked and saw that the student seated before the Sending Scroll was busy writing away. Harry peeked over her shoulder to see what was being sent.

“1 Sept. 1991 2045

From: HOGWARTS

To: ALLCOM

Subj: Roster modifications.

The following former Junior Members have started Hogwarts and are now Seniors and have been sorted as follows:

Gryffindor: Lavender Brown, Seamus Finnegan, Hermione Granger, Clarice Jameson, Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood, Parvati Patil, Harry Potter, Dean Thomas, Ron Weasley.

Huffelpuff: Hannah Abbott, Susan Bones, Ernie McMillan, Zach Smith.

Ravenclaw: Terry Boot, Mandy Brocklehurst, Padma Patil, Lisa Turpin.

Slytherin: Millie Bulstrode, Tracy Davis, Daphne Greengrass, Theo Nott.

NEW MEMBERS: (admitted on train ride from London)

Gryffindor: Sally-Anne Perks. Huffelpuff: Justin Finch-Fletchley, Megan Jones. Ravenclaw: Michael Corner, Anthony Goldstein, Su Li, Morag McDougal.

There were no Muggle Borns sorted into Slytherin and no new members from that house at this time.

END”

“It’s brilliant,” Harry said. “How much use does it get?”

“Considering it’s used to send ideas and research and such back and forth and not strictly Club security stuff, quite a bit,” Percy said. “There are groups within the Club who send spell ideas, potions ideas, historical research, not to mention Quidditch comments and the like back and forth. If we ever get some kind of voice system set up, there may well be little difference between the schools.”

“Is one in the works?” Harry asked.

“Mr. Black gave the Twins a couple of communication mirrors that he and the Marauders used to talk to one another when they were in different locations. Simple enough to use. You say the other person’s name and look in the mirror and if they are there, you’ll see and hear them. The Twins are trying to figure out how to make more of them. In addition to personal communications devices, they’re also thinking of setting up several large mirrors, one for each school. That way, groups from all the schools could meet in a room at their school and through the mirrors talk with groups from the other schools. The Twins hope to have it figured out soon so we could set things up by the end of the Christmas Hols, but we’ll see.”

“And here I thought they were just into pranks,” Neville said.

“Oh they are,” Percy said. “Doubt they’ll ever give up on that. But those two have always been inventive and that education they’re getting has allowed them to do something with their inventiveness.”

“Are these secure?” Harry asked. “Could the Ministry tap into it?”

“The scrolls? If they got their hands on an activated Receiving Scroll, they could monitor the traffic. But, they can’t make one themselves that would work. The scrolls must be charmed by the same wizard with the same wand or they won’t work.”

“And I assume the scrolls are made here?”

Percy nodded.



“How do you get them to the other schools?”

“We bring the replacement scrolls with us to Camp W had deliver it to the other school Clubs there. To date, no one has bothered to search us when we leave for the Camp. If that ever happens, we have back up plans. Right then, we are here for a meeting. Follow me.”

Percy led them to another room on the floor that was set up not unlike a conference room. They seemed to be the last to arrive. The other Club Prefects were already there as were Professors McGonagall, Sprout and Flitwick.

“It’s so good of you to join us,” McGonagall said.

“Sorry Professor,” Percy replied. “I was just showing them around.”

“Anything in particular?”

“The Comm Room.”

“Ah yes, one of our more ingenious bits. Well, we were just discussing an incident on the train. It seems one Draco Malfoy decided to begin his Hogwarts career by harassing our new Muggle Raised students. I was pleased to learn that our Slytherin friends put an end to such nonsense.”

“The little worm also tried to bully his way into the Club carriages,” a boy named Edgar Jacoby said. He was a Fifth Year Club member and a Prefect from Huffelpuff House with a chevron, diamond and “II” on one collar and “V 8990” on the other, which was the same as Percy. “Little snot does not seem to understand the world is not his oyster.”

“Any of you run into this Malfoy boy?” McGonagall asked.

“Not on the train,” Harry said. “He did make himself known just before the sorting. I haven’t decided if he’s as stupid as he sounds.”

“Draco Malfoy is the son of Lucius Malfoy,” McGonagall said.

“I figured as much,” Harry replied. “Seems the apple does not fall far from the tree.”

“Oh?”

“Well, he struck me as little more than an arrogant bigot with less brains than a slug and no ability of note aside from the natural ability to annoy people.”

“ Obviously needs remedial lessons in how to win friends and influence people,” Hermione huffed.

“Doubt he’ll stand for that,” Harry said. “He keeps that attitude and they’ll probably name a bed after him in the Hospital.”

“I hope you didn’t hex him,” McGonagall said.

“Nah. Having done his old man earlier, really didn’t see the need. Too easy.”

“Excuse me?”

Harry told McGonagall about the incident on the platform. “I gave him the benefit of the doubt,” Harry concluded. “A stunner was merciful given what that man as done in the past.”

“I wouldn’t recommend making that a habit, Mr. Potter. However, your assessment of the situation seems reasonable. I can think of no legitimate reason to raise one’s wand against another person under such conditions, short of self defense. Lord Black was unarmed?”

“He might have had a wand,” Harry said. “But he had not drawn it.”

“Right then, moving along I am told you picked up seven new Club members on the train ride.”

“Muggle Borns or Muggle Raised,” Clarice said.

“They know about the Club already,” Sprout said. “Aren’t you concerned about security? After all, both Dumbledore and Snape are accomplished in Legilimency.”

“They were Cleared, weren’t they Dora?” Harry asked.

“Naturally,” Dora Tonks replied. “That’s been standard procedure since before last year. Doesn’t mean they won’t slip up, but we have little to fear from Snape.”

“How so?” Sprout asked.

“We’re taught the Mind Arts from day one in Japan,” Harry said. “The art of occlumency is taught in all spell casting classes as it also helps develop the focus necessary to master wandless magic and non-verbal spell casting plus allows the student to master more magic in less time. In defense, we also begin learning passive Legilimency beginning in our Third Year as well as additional defenses beyond occlumency. By N.E.W.T.s, we are required to defend ourselves against an active attack and are also required to know the charms necessary to protect someone not skilled in occlumency from passive legilimency.

“Passive legilimency, while useful, has limitations. With it, I can detect deception – useful in a duel – as well as whether the other person is a skilled occlumens. I can also detect obliviation and the existence of certain memory charms. Specifically, I can detect a charm that sequesters memory both from outside probing and from the person under the charm. However, there is a charm that cannot be detected passively. It does not sequester memory at all. It simply allows a person to be deceptive about something and evade passive detection. We all learn that charm in N.E.W.T. level Defense. It does not mean they can tell an obvious lie. But it does mean they can evade the truth and not arouse the suspicions of a legilimens at least in regard to that which we wish to remain hidden; in this case the real nature of the Club. It does not mean they can’t slip up. But short of

active legilimency, Snape and Dumbledore will be none the wiser if they try to use passive legilimency to find out what is going on.”

“And active legilimency?” Sprout asked.

“It won’t stop that. Until they learn occlumency and reach the appropriate level, they are vulnerable. The whole idea of the Charm is to keep the legilimens from seeing any need.”

“And it’s not like they would,” Hermione said. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but isn’t illegal to use active legilimency on a child?”

“Some Healers may as part of a course of treatment,” McGonagall said, “but otherwise that’s true. As far as I know, that is one law Dumbledore has not violated. I’m pretty sure Snape has not crossed that line either, at least here at Hogwarts.”

“In that case, the Newbies are as safe as we can make them,” Harry said.

“Moving on,” McGonagall continued, “Quirrell?”

Harry nodded. “We are not ready to take any action against him, Min ... Professor. Even if we were, we feel it is paramount we confirm he is in fact under active possession.”

“And how will you do that?” Sprout asked.

“Ideally, a Healer can make that determination,” Harry said. “Clarice knows how. The problem is we can’t just do it without tipping him off – unless it was part of a routine examination or something. I was thinking maybe polyjuicing Clarice into an adult Healer...”

“Or getting Poppy Pomphrey onboard,” McGonagall said.

“Is she trust worthy?”

“She’s even more incensed with Dumbledore and Snape than I am about the Time Chamber mess. I think she would welcome any hope of change.

“Assuming we can verify his possession, how soon?”

“November at the earliest,” Harry said. “It’s a fair bet Voldemort will try and use Quirrell to try and kill me. I doubt he would make a go for me in class. But if I were more exposed? Say in a Quidditch Match? He might make a go. That would justify a counter action.”

“This means, of course, Harry would have to be on the Quidditch Team,” Hermione said.

“Wood has made it abundantly clear that I should allow him to select from First Years specifically because he does not think we have anyone in Gryffindor who’d be better at Seeker than Harry. Throw in that Harry already has two years of intense completion in the W.I.S.E. League and there are no other Seekers out there with any experience and ... Well, with Charlie Weasley gone now, we need all the help we can get at that position. I’m sure it can be arranged.”

“I could still play W.I.S.E. League, assuming I make the team, of course,” Harry said.

“I don’t think Wood would have it any other way. A Match is the best practice you can get and from what I’ve seen, that League is much more competitive than intra-house Quidditch.”

“And how do you propose dispatching Quirrell, assuming he’s under active possession by You-Know-Who, of course?” McGonagall asked.

“We’re working on that,” Harry said. “Obviously, we don’t want Voldemort learning anything about me if it can be helped. I could, for example, cut him down with my sword. But while that would end the possession, it would also let Voldemort know I know more than I should.

“Hermione’s working on a spell that, if it works, should do the trick. Use it against anyone else and she says they’ll experience a blissful euphoria for a short time, long enough to distract their attention but otherwise it would be harmless. Against someone possessed by Voldemort, however, it should prove lethal. Any investigation would conclude that it was an unanticipated reaction to an otherwise benign spell.

“That and a situation justifying self defense should cover our legal bases. As important as this is, I am not willing to go to prison for it.”

“Prudent,” McGonagall nodded. “If Hermione needs any help with the spell, I am sure Filius would be more than willing.”

“Indeed Minerva,” Filius Flitwick said. “It sounds most interesting.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Hermione replied.

“And the other items on your dance card this year,” McGonagall asked.

“The two horcruxes need to be destroyed,” Harry said, “but I think it best we do that after Voldemort had been dealt with.”

Minerva nodded.

“Other than that,” Hermione said, “I think we could do well with whatever information is available about the Founder’s Tower.”

“I’m already combing our library and archives for you, Hermione,” McGonagall said.

Sally Anne watched with a little sadness as Clarice and four others were escorted out of the Common Room by a Prefect. While she had met some others on the train, it was Clarice who had spoken to her the most and was the closest thing she felt she had as a friend here. Given how few friends she had back home, she really did not want to be by herself especially after what her parents did. She turned and

followed two other girls up the stairs into the tower looking for the First Year dorm.

It seemed there were two dorm rooms on each floor. The Seventh and Third Year girls were on the lowest floor, followed by the Fourth Years and Fifth Years and then there was a sign on the third floor that said First Years. She entered a large room that seemed to have three narrow but tall windows. There were six four poster beds with curtains arranged about the room and what looked like a pot bellied stove in the center. Next to each bed was a small writing desk and she could see trunks laid out at the foot of each bed. The other two girls were already seated on two beds and she looked for her trunk, finding it was in front of the bed next to the other two. Quietly, she sat on the bed and looked about the room. There was a second door other than the one they had entered and she wondered what lay beyond it.

“You must be Sally-Anne,” one of the other two girls said. Sally-Anne looked over and saw that girl had dark hair and dark skin and seemed to be smiling pleasantly. “I’m Parvati Patil,” she said.

Sally-Anne raised an eyebrow and said, “Nice to meet you. Never heard a name like that.”

“It’s Indian,” Parvati said. “My parents are from there. Well, so am I come to think about it. My sister Padma and I were born there after all. We moved to England when Pad and I were two. We’re twins you know – identical twins – although that might not be totally true seeing as she was sorted into Ravenclaw and I was sorted here.”

“Don’t tell me your hurt to be stuck with me, Parv,” the other girl said with a fake pout. “I’m Lavender Brown, by the way,” she added to Sally-Anne.

“Don’t be silly,” Parvati said. “How can I complain? It’s Pad who got the raw deal. After all we are in the same House as the High Command. And Harry is such a cutie!”

“Think he’s taken, Parv,” Lavender said. “You know he and Hermione are close.”

“That doesn’t mean...”

“And I saw them kissing on the train when I passed by their compartment...”

“You mean like real kissing?”

Lavender nodded.

“Oh we are so going to ask Hermione about that when she gets back from wherever.”

“Anyway,” Lavender said to Sally-Anne, “you’re a Muggle Born, right?”

“I suppose,” Sally-Anne replied. “How can you tell? Is it written on me or something?”

“Process of elimination,” Parvati replied, “well, sort of. You wear your Club year, which says you started in the Club this year. Of course, we could guess that as we know all the kids our age in the Club. Anyway, as you were not at Camp last weekend, that means you joined up since then, right?”

Sally-Anne nodded. “On the train.”

“And that means Muggle Born. They try and get all the Muggle Borns to join up on the train.”

“Oh. Why?”

“Well, the rest of us found out about the Club through word of mouth either from our friends or our parents found out from their friends. To find out that way you have to be connected with the magical world. That would mean no Muggle Borns and given as the High Command is all Muggle Raised, they were not about to exclude Muggle Borns.”



“I think the Club now boasts over ninety percent of the Muggle Borns between age eleven and fifteen or sixteen as members,” Lavender said, “plus any of their younger brothers and sisters who are at least six years old.”

“About a quarter of all witches and wizards that age,” Lavender added, “probably more.”

“Not to mention over half of our year here at Hogwarts,” Parvati said.

“And all of the Gryffindors in our year.”

“Just how big is this Club?” Sally-Anne asked.

“Last summer, we took the entire Club to Japan,” Lavender said. “It was something like nine hundred and twenty-seven of us.”

“And if you consider that there are only about four hundred in Hogwarts,” Parvati added.

“How can there be more kids in the Club than there are at this school, especially since not everyone here is in the Club?” Sally-Anne asked.

“You picked up on that?” Lavender asked.

“Wasn’t terribly hard. Not everyone has these things,” Sally-Anne said indicating the collar devices, “and I know most of the kids on the train remained in the forward cars including that Malfoy bastard and his friends.”

Lavender did not immediately pick up on the Malfoy reference. “Well, there are six magical schools in the British Isles. Hogwarts takes kids from all over. Most of us from magical families have been attending for generations. But we get Muggle Borns from all over Britain too. But, most magical children go to school elsewhere. Let’s see... St. Georges takes kids from London and the south of England. Preston Academy takes them from the North. St. Andrews takes in the Scots

and some from Northern Ireland. The rest of the Irish attend St. Patrick's. And St. Albans takes students from Wales and some from the west of England as well. Hogwarts is the oldest of the schools and the only boarding school. It's also the smallest. So of course most of the Club goes to school somewhere else."

"Clarice said if you've been to Japan, you're well beyond where you would be here," Sally-Anne said.

The two girls nodded.

"This was our first summer," Lavender said. "They got a time compression ward on the school so that each day on the outside is fifty days long. So we were there for thirty days or so, but were also there for fifteen hundred. That's four years and forty days, but as each academic year was three hundred days, we had five years of education. So Parv and I have already taken our O.W.L.s – that's a major test you take at the end of your fifth year of magical study – and we also progressed from our last year of Primary School to our fourth year of Secondary School."

"But you don't look any older," Sally-Anne said.

"You age at normal speed," Parvati replied. "Physically, I am eleven, just like you. Magically, Lav and I are sixteen."

"And our other roommates are even older," Lavender said. "Clarice and Hermione have finished four summers in Japan. Clarice is ten and Hermione is almost twelve, but magically their like twenty-six or older. They already have their PhDs and at least three Masteries – those are the magical equivalent of university degrees. And Luna has finished three summers so while she is almost eleven, she also like twenty-three or something. She's got her bachelors and two Masteries, I think."

"I'm so far behind," Sally-Anne whimpered slightly.

"Now don't you get your knickers in a twist," Lavender said. "You're in the Club now which means we'll make sure you do well in your

classes here. And on weekends we go to the Camp where you'll begin learning magic they don't teach here."

"And we also will make sure you're up to speed in your non-magical studies as well," Parvati added. "They did that for us and it's like a rule that we help 'younger' members do their best."

"And just think," Lavender said, "you went to regular schools before coming here, right?"

Sally-Anne nodded.

"So you'll probably test in as a non-magical Seventh Year. That's like Second Year of Secondary School. Anyway, by this time next year you'll almost be done with Secondary School and have your O.W.L.s out of the way. This time the following year, you'll already have your degree and N.E.W.T.s and your Mastery. Your parents will be so proud!"

"My parents don't want anything to do with me," Sally-Anne said. "They told me not to bother writing and not to come home."

"Oh dear!"

"Clarice said their reaction is not common, but not unheard of."

"Why'd they say that?" Parvati asked.

"When they found out I was a real witch, they said something about my being touched by the Devil and other things. Am I?"

"Not hardly," Parvati said. "Magic's been around forever. The belief that it's evil is mostly a Christian superstition, although some of the more conservative Muslims are not so different in that regard."

"And you?"

“Hindu. Magic is highly praised as a blessing from the gods,” Parvati said. “Same’s true with Shinto. I’m told the Jews don’t see it as a curse. But Christians have an issue with it.”

“Nothing about it in the scriptures,” Lavender said. “Since they are silent on the issue, those more fundamental Christians assume it’s evil. Then again, the witch burnings were more about keeping all women down than about getting rid of real witches. That was mostly on the Continent. England, Wales and Ireland were never really into it.”

“Scotland was,” Parvati said. “One of the two books about how to hunt witches was written by King James VI of Scotland who later became James I of England. The other, the *Maleus Malefactorum*, was written by a couple of catholic priests who were part of the Inquisition. That book was banned by the Pope and the authors excommunicated as heretics, but it still caught on in Europe.”

“How’d you know that?” Sally-Anne asked.

“Part of our magical history studies in Japan,” Lavender said. “The older kids say the history they teach here isn’t even worth reading, but we have to act like it’s important anyway.”

“Why?”

“Technically speaking, we’re not supposed to be going to Japan and learning things that the Ministry of Magic considers foreign. One day, we’ll let them know what’s what. For now, we keep our real learning a secret.”

“It’s illegal?”

“No. Not really. It’s illegal to teach much of what we learned. But it’s not illegal to learn it. Since we didn’t learn it here and it was not taught in the school by faculty, we get around the laws that exist. But we don’t tell anyone about it unless they are in the Club as well.”

“Why not?”

“Because the bigoted idiots who run this country might find out from their bigoted progeny and make it illegal to keep the rest of us in our place.”

“Excuse me?”

“To quote our fearless leader Harry Potter,” Parvati said, “who shall break the hearts of thousands of young girls once it becomes known he has a girlfriend: ‘This country is run by the Purebloods for the Purebloods and the rest of us are supposed to rot.’”

“Purebloods? That Malfoy boy and his friends were on about that. But what does it mean?” Sally-Anne asked.

“Lavender and I are what is known as Half-Bloods. Our parents are magical, but you go back a generation or two or three and you will find at least one Muggle ancestor. In my case, my Mum’s parents were not magical at all. My Daddy’s family has many generations of magicals, but they prefer marrying first or second generation witches, so they are Half-Bloods.”

“Muggle Born technically means anyone who is magical but whose parents are not,” Lavender said. “Although it seems here in Britain that the term is applied to anyone Muggle Raised, regardless of who their real parents are.”

“Muggle raised?”

“A fair few Muggle Borns actually had magical parents but were set up for adoption in the Muggle World,” Lavender said. “As far as the Purebloods bigots are concerned, they are no better than Muggle Borns. Those people think Muggles are little better than animals and anyone who associates with them or was raised in their world is sullied beyond redemption.”

“Is that why Malfoy and his friends called me a ‘Mudblood’?”

“That and they’re idiots,” Parvati said. “Pureblood simply means all of your ancestors back through your great-great grandparents or so were magical. They think it makes them superior for some reason. Truth is my family can trace its magic back well over a thousand years, far longer than many of those bigots. But because I’m a Half-blood they think they’re better than me.”

“Maybe fifteen percent of all the magicals in Britain could claim to be Purebloods,” Lavender said. “For most, the only way they can is because they arrange marriages.”

“Arranged marriages?”

“Usually as soon as the kids display accidental magic,” Lavender nodded. “That could be even before they can walk.”

“But what if they don’t like each other?”

“For them, it doesn’t work that way. Once your parents sign the contract with the other family, you are all but stuck with the match.”

“That’s so wrong,” Sally-Anne said.

“It used to be more common,” Lavender said. “Still is in certain Muggle situations.”

“Such as?”

“Royalty. Well, maybe not the way the Pureblood Supremacists do it, but they still kind of do it that way.”

“You’re talking about Prince Charles and Princess Diana?”

Lavender nodded. “They were not matched as children, but they were kind of set up to date and the match was approved because she was the daughter of a Lord or some such. I don’t get the idea they really like each other.”

“So, why does Malfoy and that lot...?”

“They think they’re better than anyone. All the Supremacists do. It’s all rubbish, of course. But those idiots have control of our government and ... well, hopefully that will change one day.”

“You needn’t worry yourself about those morons,” Parvati said. “There is none of that lot in the Club and we protect our own, so to speak, and that includes you.”

“Pity you couldn’t protect me from my parents,” Sally-Anne moped.

“Maybe not before,” Lavender said, “but now? I’m sure something will be worked out. I’m told Harry had a rough time of it with his Muggle relatives when he was little. He’ll make things right.”

“I hope so,” Sally-Anne said. “Clarice said as much.”

“There you go then.”

“So what about those Death Eaters I was told about?”

“The worst of the Pureblood lot,” Lavender said.

“Clarice said they were like the Nazis.”

“Aside from the fact they did not succeed in taking over, she’s right. Goodness knows what would have happened if they had succeeded. As it was, a lot of good people died. If you weren’t one of them, they killed you just because they could.”

“And the government?”

“They took forever to do anything,” Lavender said. “Waited until it was almost too late, really. My parents told me it was because the government was overridden with sympathizers and such and was afraid that if they went after the Death Eater too many ‘proper’

families would be wiped out. Most of the Death Eaters were from those families. If it were up to me, the country and world would be better off without them and their families. But that's just me."

"And I thought..."

"That the magical world would be some kind of Utopia?" Parvati finished.

Sally-Anne nodded.

"Magic is a skill, not a cure for the human condition. We are just as good and just as flawed as anyone. That means we are just as capable of having evil men in our midst as the rest of humanity. But we hope to fix things one day."

"That's why so many of us are going to school in Japan," Lavender added. "One day, the bigots will learn they have no power and they are not wanted or needed."

"So are all the Purebloods that way?" Sally-Anne asked.

"Oh no. Not hardly. Maybe a third or less are and the rest are normal, decent people. That lot couldn't get into the Club if they tried so if you stick with us, you won't really have to worry about them. There are purebloods like us, but they believe as we do that your ancestors mean nothing. You are what you choose to be and you are what you can be.

"But that third has money and political power so they are quite annoying. Something is seriously wrong when five percent of the population has almost total control of the rest of us. Of course, that means there's something that needs fixing."

"Why do I think that I've just been thrown into a world filled with revolutionaries?" Sally-Anne asked rhetorically.

"Probably because you have been," Parvati said.



The meeting ended and McGonagall joined Percy in providing the others with a tour of the Club Corridor. There really was not much to see as far as they were concerned. On the Sixth Floor was what Harry considered a more than adequate Potions Lab provided they had the ingredients which were in a separate room. Fortunately as far as he was concerned, his magically expanded trunk included what he considered a fully stocked Potions pantry. There was also a separate room that the Twins and a few of their “assistants” had commandeered to use to make enchanted items such as the communications scrolls.

Percy told them that he and his younger brothers were giving serious consideration to opening some shops when they finished school. While they were all good at pranking, Percy said they each had skills that could make them some real money on the outside. The twins were more inventive with regard to enchanting items and potions. Not that Percy considered him a slouch in those areas, but they were the mad geniuses. Percy was better at coming up with ideas for stuff and figuring out how to make them in bulk and distribution. Between the three of them and with an adequate staff, he figured they could easily have the biggest store in Britain within a few years if they could get it off the ground. They were already working on mail order items that could be made for little and sold for a good profit.

Hermione was concerned that so many of their secrets were discussed at the meeting. She was reminded that everyone who was there was at the earlier meeting where all of the stuff had been discussed before, if not in such detail. McGonagall told her they needed to know at least some of the details as the faculty sponsors of the Club and Club Prefects’ primary role was to “run interference” for the Club. This meant they were the ones who would keep Dumbledore, Snape and the Ministry from learning about what was really going on by “covering” for Club activities that might raise suspicion. To date, that was mostly the hexing of school bullies. But even that could expose the Club without others covering for them as most all Club members knew more magic than was normal. Considering this year the Club would be behind getting rid of Voldemort, that was a “prank” that would require a well thought out cover well in advance and she was pleased that Harry and the others were not going to try and deal with that problem right away.

It was not long before the group left the corridor to return to the common room for the night. They were within sight of the portrait of the fat lady when a voice stopped them.

“Well, well,” the voice said, “not even here a day and already breaking the rules by being out of bed! Oh, have I plans for you lot!”

They turned and saw a thin man with long hair and a mean looking face with a cat by his side.

“Mr. Filch,” Percy said, “these students are with me and I am a Prefect.”

“And I hope they were being properly punished for something. What sort of mischief have they been up to, pray tell?”

“Where they have been and why is none of your concern since they are with a Prefect and not skulking about unsupervised.”

“Fine,” the man grumbled. “Come along, Mrs. Norris.”

Just after the portrait closed and the group was alone in the Common Room, Percy turned to them. “That was Mr. Filch. Just between you and me, I think he’s a squib. I’ve never seen him with a wand or doing magic. He’s the caretaker here, although I think his real job is to get students in trouble. The only time I’ve ever seen a hint of a smile on his face is when he’s supervising a detention. He always moans about not being able to whip students or hang them up in the dungeons.”

“He doesn’t seem very nice,” Luna said.

“I don’t think the concept of ‘nice’ is within his comprehension,” Percy replied. “Well, I suggest you all head up. Club members are to meet here at six for our morning workout.”

Harry kissed Hermione on the cheek and headed up towards the boys dormitory just behind Neville while Hermione followed Clarice

and Luna up towards the girls' dormitory. They reached the room and opened the door just in time to hear a squeal.

"I did it!" the voice called.

Hermione looked and could see it was the new girl.

"What happened?" Hermione asked.

"Oh it was wonderful!" the new girl said. "Parvati and Lavender were showing me how to do wandless magic and I made the feather move and then turned it into something else. It wasn't exactly what I wanted, but they said even doing it is a good thing and I did and..."

"You're babbling," Lavender laughed.

"Sorry."

"That's okay, Sally-Anne."

"It's just so exciting! I mean actually doing magic 'cause I want to and not because something made me..."

"How long?" Hermione asked the other two.

"' Bout twenty minutes," Parvati said.

"That's pretty good," Hermione said.

"Can I ask you a question?" Sally-Anne asked Hermione.

"Sure."

"Well, Lavender and Parvati told me they've known they were magical since they were little. Clarice said she was almost seven when she found out. What about you?"

"I was eight," Hermione said. "Had no clue before then."

“So you’re a Muggle Born then?”

“To the Purebloods,” Hermione said. “Muggle Raised actually. I was adopted when I was a baby.”

“Oh. Does it matter?”

“What?”

“Whether your parents are magical or not?”

“To the Pureblood elites it does. But in reality, it doesn’t matter at all.”

“Says the girl who was first in her year all through school,” Parvati said.

“She was first ‘cause she’s really smart and worked really hard,” Clarice said.

“Says the girl who was third in that same year.”

“Whose brother was second.”

“Well, he is older than me.”

“And what about you?” Sally-Anne asked Luna.

“I’m Luna Lovegood, by the way. I was a summer behind Hermione and Clarice and I was second in my year.”

“So, I’m in a room full of smart people?”

“We’re not that smart,” Lavender said.

“We’re only in the top ten percent of our year,” Parvati added. “My sister’s the smart one. Besides, most of us who attend full summers do well.”

“I guess.”

“And we will help you do well too,” Lavender said. “Gotta maintain the high standards we’ve come to expect in this room, don’t we.”

After a laugh, Parvati turned to Hermione. “Speaking of high standards, spill it, Hermione.”

“What?” Hermione asked in surprise.

“Oh please! Lavender said she saw you kissing Harry Potter on the train.”

“Oh?”

“So are you like boyfriend and girlfriend?” Lavender asked.

Hermione nodded blushing furiously.

“Have you seen him naked?” Parvati asked.

“What?” Hermione replied in shock.

“Yes, she has,” Clarice said. “We both have and we have pictures.”

“You do?”

“We do? I thought you said there wasn’t film in the camera!”

“Maybe there was, maybe there wasn’t. Not that I would have developed naked pictures of my brother. That’s so wrong on so many levels.”

“Then why did you see him,” Lavender asked.

“First of all, this was a few years ago,” Clarice said. “He pranked us so we pranked him back.”

“Forced him to run naked through the hall ‘cause we stole all his clothes and towels when he was in the shower,” Hermione added.

“And whenever he gets an attitude, we threaten to develop the film,” Clarice finished.

“And he’s still your boyfriend?” Lavender asked.

“He doesn’t have to be told things twice,” Hermione said.

“So cute and trainable too,” Parvati giggled. “Lucky girl.”

“Are you two going to spend the whole night prying into my love life, such as it is?” Hermione asked rolling her eyes.

“If you let us,” Lavender said with a laugh.

“Do I need to remind you we need to be up, dressed and down in the common room at six for our morning exercise?”

“You’re serious about that,” Parvati said.

“If you don’t use it, you lose it,” Hermione replied.

“You’ve been telling Harry that, have you?” Lavender joked.

“Fine! Harry and I are together and yes he kissed me and I most certainly kissed back! But we are a bit young for that!”

“Just messing with you,” Parvati said apologetically.

“Well, messing with Hermione time is over. We all need our sleep!”

“Yes mother,” Lavender whined.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: POTIONS MASTER

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2nd, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Sally Anne sat at the Gryffindor table across from Lavender and Parvati at breakfast the next morning. She had been dragged out of bed at what she thought was an ungodly hour and then dragged outside where the other Club members had gathered. The morning workout consisted of a lot of stretching, which she did not mind, followed by a run. She had not been expected to do much of that back in her school in Nottingham and although she and the other Muggle Borns only had to run about a mile, it seemed like a marathon to her. And then she heard the other students typically ran three miles.

“You do that every morning?” she asked as she put her breakfast on the plate.

Lavender nodded. “It’s not loads of fun. But being in good physical condition makes magic easier, so we suffer through it.”

“There are actually people who like doing that,” Parvati said with a bit of a huff.

“Like who?” Sally-Anne asked.

“Harry,” Lavender said. “He ran competitively at school.”

“Guess that’s one good reason not to be his girlfriend,” Parvati said.

“Oh?”

“Hermione was on the Juniors Swim team...”

“As was Harry,” Lavender added. “Hermione was better, though.”

“Still, it does wake you up,” Parvati said.

“I suppose,” Sally-Anne moaned.

“Excuse me young ladies,” a voice said. The three looked up and saw Professor McGonagall. “I have your schedules for this term.” She handed each of them a slip of parchment and the three girls looked them over.

“What’s the damage?” an older girl asked. Lavender and Parvati knew her from the Club and introduced Sally-Anne to Katie Bell and her friend Leanne Tinker.

“We got Transfiguration first thing,” Parvati said.

“With the Huffelpuffs apparently,” Lavender nodded.

“It’s one of the better courses here,” Katie said. “McGonagall teaches over the summer, you know.” The latter comment was for Sally-Anne as the other two already knew that from the past summer.

“Defense right before lunch,” Sally-Anne said.

“That course is rubbish,” Katie said. “Just try and get by and wait for summer to learn it proper.”

“That bad?” Lavender asked.

“They never have a professor for more than a year and we aren’t really allowed to learn anything useful according to the older kids. Who’s it with?”

“Slytherins,” Parvati said.

“Club ones are okay. The rest are a right pain.”

“Charms with the Ravenclaws after lunch,” Lavender noted.

“Another good course,” Leanne said, “as is Herbology. The rest are barely worth attending. Of course you still have to.”



“So that’s it for today?” Katie asked.

“And Wednesdays and Fridays,” Lavender said.

“Not too bad. What about the other days?”

“Three hours of Herbology with Huffelpuff on Tuesday morning. Three hours of Potions with Slytherin Thursday morning...”

“Figures,” Katie said. “I think they do that on purpose.”

“What?”

“I think every year we get stuck with the Slytherins in Potions.”

“And that’s a problem?” Sally-Anne asked.

“Professor Snape teaches it and he’s nasty,” Katie said. “He’s head of Slytherin and hates us Gryffindors on principal. Add to that the non-Club Snakes are just as nasty and it’s not a pleasant experience.”

“Has he ever given a Gryffindor points?” Leanne asked.

“Not that anyone knows. If he has, he was probably under the influence of some mind altering potion. On the other hand, he gives Slytherins points for showing up.”

“Surely it’s not that bad,” Parvati said.

“It’s only a slight exaggeration,” Katie replied. “Fortunately, there is the summer. And Tuesday and Thursday afternoons?”

“History of Magic...” Parvati began.

“Bring a pillow. You read the book at all and you’ll pass,” Leanne said.

“And astronomy,” Parvati finished.

“It’s okay,” Leanne said. “Then again, if the weather’s clear your class is late at night which can be a pain.”

“Why?”

“Can’t very well see the stars from inside, can you?”

Sally-Anne soon found herself in a classroom at a desk that sat two people. She was paired with her roommate Luna Lovegood. In front of her and Luna were Harry Potter and Hermione and in the desk next to them Clarice and Neville Longbottom. Lavender and Parvati were seated in the desk next to her. The other three Gryffindor boys were behind them. They were on one side of the classroom while on the other were the students from Hufflepuff. On the desk where she assumed a teacher would sit there was a tabby cat that seemed to be looking over everyone in the room.

“That’s Professor McGonagall,” Luna whispered.

“We’re taking lessons from a cat?” Sally-Anne asked back.

“She’s not really a cat. It’s a kind of magic based upon Transfiguration. It’s called an Animagus.”

“She can turn into any animal?”

“Oh no. Each person can only have one Common Form. I guess you could use a spell and become anything, but you could only become an animal about the same size and mass that you already are and even then not for long. Animagus, however, is not related to the person’s size and you can remain like that for ages if you want.”

“Cool.”

The clock on the wall struck nine and the cat transformed into a tall, older witch with square rimmed glasses and a serious expression.

“Welcome to Hogwarts and Transfiguration,” she said. “I am Professor McGonagall and as you may recall from last night’s feast I am the Deputy Headmistress. For those Gryffindors who have not figured it out yet, I am also Head of your House.

“Transfiguration is one of the most difficult, complex and potentially dangerous forms of spell casting you will learn here. Consequently, I expect you to pay attention and not to horse around in class. Any such shenanigans could well earn you an invitation to continue your magical education somewhere else. This will be your first and only warning.

“Now, can anyone tell me what you just witnessed?”

Sally-Anne was one of several students who raised her hand. Had she noticed, she would have seen that McGonagall was looking for students who were true First Years. McGonagall called on her. “Yes Miss?”

“Perks, Professor, Sally-Anne Perks. You’re an animagus.”

“And what is that?”

“As I understand it, it’s a form of transfiguration. You can turn into that cat at will, but only that cat. There might be other spells that could allow you to turn into something else, but it would have to be something about your – er – weight and would not last as long.”

“Very good. Five points to Gryffindor. You’re new to magic, yes?”

Sally-Anne nodded. “Luna told me that earlier.”

“And you obviously paid attention. Now, for today’s lesson...”

The lesson was fairly tame when compared to seeing an animagus transformation for the first time. The students were asked to

transfigure a match stick into a needle. It seemed easy enough, but Sally-Anne had remembered how hard it was to change a feather into something else from the night before, and in that case she was not asked to change it into anything in particular, just something different. Luna talked her through the process and told her that visualization, focus and willing the change were keys. For ten minutes she waived her new wand and uttered the incantation as McGonagall had told them with no effect. Luna, however, seemed unconcerned and helped her relax.

Suddenly, after what seemed like her hundredth try, she looked down and saw a perfect needle before her. "Professor?" she asked.

McGonagall walked over and looked at the needle. She then looked at Luna.

"Just told her to relax and focus," Luna said.

"Excellent work then, Miss Perks. Another five points to Gryffindor."

Luna then transfigured her match stick into a needle. Sally-Anne noted that it seemed as if McGonagall winked at Luna before heading off to look over the other students.

Their last class of the day was right after lunch and once it was over, Sally-Anne, Parvati and Lavender followed Luna to another part of the castle. They passed through a doorway that was normally hidden by a painting of two wizards playing chess and into what looked like an expanded version of the common room, except that while their common room was all decorated in scarlet and gold, this one had hangings representing all four houses and a lot of decorations that looked very oriental. Luna told them this was part of the Club Corridor, which was where the Club held whatever it held at school. She admitted she really did not know much more than that being that she was here for only the second time and had never attended Hogwarts before.

Sally-Anne looked around and saw a lot of students were about. Some were reading, others talking and still others engaged in some

kind of game or another. A red haired first year from her house, who she remembered was named Ron Weasley, was playing chess with a first year girl from Slytherin whose name escaped her. That fact alone told how different the Club was from the rest of the School. The four kids who had picked on her on the train were Slytherins and she gathered they were not the Club types. It was clear what they thought about Gryffindors from Defense Class, and what the Gryffindors thought of them and no one could say they were nice thoughts.

“Hello,” a girl said and Sally-Anne saw a blonde haired Slytherin standing before her. “I’m Daphne Greengrass. Don’t let this fool you,” she said pointing to the Slytherin crest on her robes, “we’re not all useless gits like Malfoy and his lot. Club first, school second, and here our Houses don’t matter. So, how was your first day?”

“Sally-Anne Perks,” she replied. “It was – er – different. I liked Transfiguration and Charms. Defense not so much.”

“Almost reminded me of my first day in Japan,” Daphne said. “Right from the start, they’re talking in Japanese. Helped us learn the language real fast, but it was a bit disorienting at first. Quirrell might as well be talking in a foreign language. I don’t think I understood a word he said.”

Sally-Anne nodded. True, she had hardly done a study of English proficiency in the British Schools, but she had never heard a teacher with such an incomprehensible speech impediment. “Glad I’m not the only one.”

“Arguably, the worst one yet,” an older girl said. The “VII” on her left collar identified her as a Seventh Year. “Last year wasn’t so bad, but this one’s useless. We’ll probably be offering a separate course here in the Club so you new members won’t lose out.”

“Thanks.”

“I never thought I’d see a professor who makes Snape look good. As nasty as he is, you can understand him.”

“You already had Defense?” another voice asked. It was Harry with Hermione right by his side.

“Second Period,” the girl said. “I’m Dora Tonks, by the way,” she added for Sally-Anne, “and the supposed leader of this motley crew.”

“I thought we were,” Harry said. He seemed to be joking.

“You lead us all, Cousin. You got six schools to worry about. I only have one.”

“Thanks a lot,” Harry said in false disappointment.

“He, Hermione and Clarice started all of this,” Tonks said turning to Sally-Anne. “And once I find our other new members, I’ll tell you all about it.”

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Potions was one of Harry’s favorite courses in Japan. He was naturally a little upset to learn it was one of the most hated at Hogwarts. No one, aside from Snakes like Malfoy liked the teacher and he apparently didn’t like students. Still, Harry wondered, it can’t be that bad. He sat next to Hermione a couple rows from the front of the classroom which was located in the dungeons meaning if it were not for the candles, the room would be dark as a cave. It seemed oppressive.

This was their first Potions Class. Neville and Clarice were in the same row as Harry, which he thought might make things interesting. He and Neville were Potions Masters and Clarice knew more than a little as she was a Healer. Hermione had done extremely well on her N.E.W.T.s, and in the Potions portion of her Defense Mastery, but had not gone on for additional training, focusing on other specialties.

Harry was slightly pleased to see that the Snakes, the Slytherins who were not and would never be in the Club (unless they had a life changing experience and a personality transplant) were all in the

back row by themselves. The only good news was they had not caused any trouble since the train as far as Harry knew. But he did know their type. They were too dumb to remain innocuous forever.

The slamming of a door made him and just about everyone else jump. A man entered. He was all dressed in black with black robes that seemed to flap in the air from his movements.

“Johnny Cash called,” Harry whispered, “he wants his wardrobe back.”

Hermione did her best, but could not help but snicker. Neville and Clarice did not even bother to try.

“There will be no silly wand waiving or incantations in this class,” the man began with a voice that sounded condescending. “As such, many of you may feel there is little need for this and will thus be unable to appreciate the precise science and subtle art that is potions making or the sublime beauty of a simmering cauldron. But for those few ... with the proper disposition ... I can teach you to brew fame, bottle glory, even put a stopper in death.”

“Rather melodramatic,” Harry whispered.

“Hush,” Hermione whispered back.

“Then again,” the man continued, a little louder and clearly glaring at Harry, “perhaps there are some of us who feel they are so omniscient they do not need to pay attention. Ah! Mr. Potter! Our new celebrity!” the man sneered.

Harry could hear the Snakes snickering behind him. As amusing as this was, he really had not wanted the man’s attention at all. This was just creepy.

“Mr. Potter. What would you make if I asked you to combine powdered root of asphodel with an infusion of wormwood?”

“If that was all you told me, a mess.”

Several students chuckled as Harry went on.

“However, if mixed in the proper proportions, which is two to one and placed in a water base and heated to low boil for thirty minutes until it achieved the consistency of syrup and a light, yellow color, you get a potion called the Draught of the Living Dead which is commonly used by Healers dealing with extremely painful, life threatening injuries as the consumer is placed into a coma and would no longer feel or remember anything until revived.”

Snape’s pale face almost took on some color. “Where would you look if I asked you to find me a Bezoar?”

“As with your first question, it’s not well worded,” Harry replied. “Any properly stocked potions lab should have at least one. They are commonly available at the apothecary shops. However, if your are asking what it is and where I could find one without going to Diagon Alley, it is a stone that is found in the stomach of a goat. However, those goats that do produce them typically are rare so it is not advisable to start carving them up as those that do produce them, produce them regularly and they eventually pass through their system. I would say find the right goat and start poking through its dung.”

“Ewww!” a couple of girls squealed.

“However, as they are an antidote for most magical poisons, a little mess leads to a large reward,” Harry finished.

“Name two poisons it won’t cure,” Snape hissed.

“Certain magical Venoms are beyond its powers such as basilisk and acromantula. locane is another.”

“What is the difference between monkshood and wolfsbane?”

“As a plant, none,” Harry replied. “The plant is known as aconite. However, the terms refer to different preparation of the leaves. Monkshood is dried out and reduced to a powder and wolfsbane is



pickled. As active potions ingredients they have very different properties and are not interchangeable. Untreated Aconite is actually a third ingredient.”

Harry knew the three questions were beyond what was in the text for first year. What a Bezoar did was standard potions safety and was the only part of any of the questions he might have faced first term in Japan. The rest of the question, however, was O.W.L. level. The others had also been beyond what any of these First Years should expect to see on exams, but it was clear Snape was trying to humiliate him.

The questions kept coming and kept getting more advanced and Harry kept answering them. He knew it was stupid as they were now well into N.E.W.T. levels and his original excuse if called out would have been he read ahead over the summer and had a photographic memory (which was not true, but as a skilled occlumens that would not matter). Obviously, that excuse had just gone from plausible to impossible.

For over two hours, Snape grilled him with ever more difficult questions and he kept answering, if not to Snape's satisfaction, at least in a way where Snape would not say he was wrong. He was now into Master's Level questions and the grilling did remind him of his Master's Level oral examinations. He knew he was being stupid and stubborn and should have faltered long ago just to end this and keep his true education secret, but something about the man in front of him had his back up. He could sense both Hermione and Neville trying to hint he should back down, but he could not. The man had called him out and it was clear Snape expected Harry to be full of himself because of that Boy-Who-Lived rubbish. Harry had never given that persona a thought. His confidence was because of what he had done in the last few years, not because of some event in the distant past he neither remembered nor acknowledged. And he was not about to let anyone think he cared about or rested upon that other Harry Potter.

At the two hour mark, Snape suddenly stopped with a surprised look upon his face. Maybe he finally realized how advanced the questions

were, Harry thought. That's one spiteful man if it took him that long to figure that out. Not that it does me any good.

The man's eyes narrowed. "Twenty points from Gryffindor for your insufferable cheek. Private potions lessons I assume?"

Harry shrugged.

"There seems to be far more to you than meets the eye, Mr. Potter."

Great, Harry thought.

"Today's lesson was to make a potion that can cure boils," Snape said. "The reason is that it is a useful potion to have as the ailment is a frequent occurrence in this class, although not by design. I hope you all understand the potential consequences of what can happen in this class if you do not follow directions precisely. The directions are on the board and ingredients in the cupboards. It normally takes over an hour to brew properly and since Mr. Potter has monopolized our time, you can all blame him for the zeros you receive when you fail to complete the task. But rest assured I shall deduct five points from Mr. Potter for each such zero."

Harry looked at the board. "That's not right," he whispered to Hermione and loud enough for Neville to hear.

"Don't you think you're in enough trouble?" Hermione asked.

"That formula is not right," Neville agreed. "Pretty much guarantees a zero."

"Hermione, get our ingredients, I'll write out corrections our 'friends' can use."

"I don't believe this!" Hermione said as she got up and headed for the cupboard.

Harry, meanwhile, was writing.

“Skip Steps 5 and 6 altogether and bin those ingredients.

Add 3 additional ounces in Step 7.

When it boils, IMMEDIATELY remove cauldron from heat and stir vigorously (direction does not matter) until mixture turns deep tan, then stop and it's done.

HP”

He passed the note to Neville who nodded in agreement then waived his hand making copies. Neville passed them out to the other Club members who looked at Harry and then got to work. Fortunately, the “Snakes” were too busy setting up and making derogatory comments to notice.

Just before the class ended, Snape returned to the room and from the expression on his face expected a disaster that had not come to pass. Fifteen of the twenty-one students had somehow already finished their potions and Snape went up to one of the Slytherins, Tracy Davis, and checked it. The surprise was evident on his face. As he looked into the other cauldrons, he grudgingly handed out “Acceptables” to Harry and fifteen others. When he reached the Snakes in the back row, however, it was six zeros because none of them had finished.

“Do you mind explaining this minor miracle, Potter?” he sneered.

“I note that the formula on the board is the same one in our book,” Harry said carefully. For some reason Harry was pleased that the author was not Severus Snape. “The author either has a sick sense of humor or needs to write fiction for a living. The ingredients in steps five and six are not only unnecessary and have no magical effect on the desired product, they also make it much harder to brew. The first one practically triples the brewing time for no magical gain in either: effect, quality or potency. The second one is similarly useless, unless you like exploding cauldrons. Leaving the proper brew on after it begins to boil, in addition to increasing the brewing time yet again, actually dilutes the effect, meaning you need more of the potion to do what you want.”

“Are you suggesting you might know more than the author who, I must add, is a highly respected Potions Master?”

“In regards to this potion, it should be obvious.”

“I see,” Snape sneered. “Thirty points, Mr. Potter. Or did you think I was joking when I said five points for every zero?”

“No Sir,” Harry said.

“And I think a detention will do too. I know how this Club you seem to belong to likes its Saturdays off. For your detention, you will teach a three hour Potions Class to all First Years this Saturday. No exceptions will be granted!”

“Yes sir,” Harry said as meekly as he could. “Any particular topic?”

“It will be your class, Mr. Potter. So long as it’s relevant to potions and the class brews something, it will be your call. And I will be there,” he announced in a louder voice just in case people were not listening. “While I doubt Mr. Potter is capable, I do expect the rest of you to take it as seriously as any other class. If you fail to perform because you can’t or won’t try, I will place the necessary mark in your report and deduct house points.”

While no one liked this, it was clear the Snakes liked it the least.

“Oh,” Snape added. “Crabbe, Goyle, Malfoy, Zabini, Miss Runcorn and Miss Parkinson, five points off from each of you for not being cunning enough to get the proper potions formula when everyone else seemed to be using it. Class dismissed!” With that Snape turned and stormed out of the dungeon.

Hermione was glaring at Harry, who could only hang his head.

“Hey Professor,” a voice called. Harry at first thought it might be Malfoy, but he had apparently already left with the other Snakes. It was Ron with Millie Bulstrode by his side. “That was bloody brilliant,” Ron said.

“Shutting Snape up,” Millie said. “You’ll be a Hogwarts legend by nightfall. And thanks for the tips.”

“You’re welcome,” Harry said cautiously, waiting for Hermione to scold him into next year.

“Not sure I could have kept my head,” Ron said. “I’d have done something stupid.”

“Like what?” Hermione asked in a hiss, “announced to the whole school that Harry’s really a Potions Master in disguise? Blow the Club secret wide open?”

“Erm, no not that,” Ron said. “Something dumber probably.”

“Well, what Harry did wasn’t brilliant,” Hermione said.

“Depends on your point of view,” Ron replied, “but I guess.”

“To be honest,” Neville said, “I might have done something similar if it was me.”

“You wouldn’t!”

“He was goading him, Hermione,” Neville said. “Would you have played dumb if someone questioned your ability or knowledge of Transfiguration?”

Hermione could not answer, for the answer was obvious.

“We knew coming here was a risk,” Neville said. “But it is also necessary and with a thousand of us who can shift to Japan without a problem, it’s not like the Ministry can stop us now if they wanted to.”

“But what about the others,” Hermione began.

“There are already close to two thousand adults who are behind this Club, including two Senior Ministry Department Heads and some powerful members of the Wizengamot. Politically, it would not be a good day for the Ministry were they to try and take action. True, we should try and keep this quiet longer, for when there are three thousand of us we’d be even harder to stop, but even as it is, the momentum is with us.”

“Anyway,” Ron said, “it’s only twenty points. Sally-Anne seems to get that many a day.”

Sally-Anne smile at this. It was not absolutely true, but aside from Potions and History, she had gotten at least ten points in each class thus far.

“It was fifty points,” Hermione said.

“Oh, I don’t count the other thirty as the Snakes lost the same amount,” Ron replied. He then turned to Millie: “No offense.”

“None taken,” Millie said with a smile. “We all know you tend to stick your foot in it now and then. Besides, it was Malfoy and his lot for the most part and they are not going to enjoy the Common Room tonight when the older students found out that Snape took points from them. They might want to find an abandoned classroom to hide in. Although I do feel sorry for Zabini in a way.”

“Oh?” a few voices asked.

“He’s not from Britain. He’s only ‘with’ Malfoy ‘cause he’s not in the Club. And even then, he prefers staying as clear of that lot as possible.”

“Possible Club member?” Harry asked.

Millie shrugged. “The older ones are checking him out. But it’s clear he does not like being mentioned in the same sentence as Malfoy.”

“Oh I don’t know if that’s such a bad thing,” Ron said. “While usually I’d agree with that; ‘Ron Weasley kicked Draco Malfoy’s arse’ is a sentence I could tolerate with me and him in it.”

Millie laughed.

As Harry and Hermione left the classroom, she whispered: “Just ‘cause no one else seems upset doesn’t mean I’m not mad at you.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I mean, I can understand Neville’s point and really don’t know what I would have done if it was one of my areas. I’d like to think I’d play dumb, but ... You may want to swallow that pride, at least in front of Snape.”

“I’ll try,” Harry said. “To be honest, I wasn’t expecting that.”

“That is a point we can agree on. He really doesn’t like you, does he?”

What Harry had not known until that afternoon was that McGonagall had an office in the Club Corridor. It was located on the Sixth Floor with the classrooms that the Club used for tutoring and study sessions. Then again, she was the faculty advisor and it made sense to have an office here when Club issues needed to be discussed. Still, Harry was not pleased about this one at all.

“Come in,” a voice called after he knocked. “Have a seat, Harry,” she added. There was a hint of disappointment in her voice which was probably even more painful than if she had gone off on a rant. Harry took his seat.

“A rather interesting Potions Lesson this morning, I’ve heard,” she began. “Quite unusual.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry said.

“Nonsense,” McGonagall replied. “I will admit it was not the best use of your intellect, but I was told he was asking for it in a way. Still, you do realize the potential problem?”

Harry nodded.

“As a precaution, we’ve sent a message out to the other schools alerting them of a possible security breach so they can take what they deem as appropriate precautions. That, I might add, is a first for the Club. Then again, one might argue that the fact that we’ve managed to avoid the Bludger this long, given the numbers we are dealing with, is a significant accomplishment. That does not excuse what happened.”

“No Ma’am,” Harry said.

“The good news is that while Professor Snape explained your first Potions lesson in excruciating detail, for some reason he has failed to connect your – and I quote – highly suspect level of knowledge in Potions with the Club.”

“Oh?”

“He does think you are a member,” McGonagall said, “and is sure a few of your classmates are as well. I think the hardware on your collars gives that away. But he only brought up the Club as he felt that ruining your Saturday was a particularly harsh punishment, especially since he decided all the rest of your year should share in your misery and miss out on whatever it is the Club gets on with while away from school.”

“I will admit I am not thrilled with spending my Saturday with him and even less thrilled my friends have to share in my misery, Harry replied.

“Keep that in mind for the future, Harry.”

“So if he does not connect the Club to what happened in Class, what is his thinking about it?”



“He does connect some of what happened to the Club,” McGonagall said. “He noted that all the kids with ‘things’ on their collars made acceptable potions while those who did not failed. He’s pretty sure the ‘things’ on the collars and the Club are connected and is also sure that you somehow helped the others. He regretted not saying you could not help the others for he says he missed that opportunity to dock you even more points.

“That being said, he does think you had outside help. It is the only way to explain how a First Year could answer questions that are even beyond N.E.W.T. levels.”

“Please don’t say he suspects a school,” Harry said. “One of the purposes of the Club is to hide the fact that a thousand or more of us are getting our educations overseas.”

“No, he does not suspect a school,” McGonagall replied.

“Well, if not the Club or another school, what then?”

“Sirius Black,” McGonagall said.

“What? That’s ridiculous!”

“Are you suggesting that Sirius is incapable of teaching you potions?”

“No. It’s not that at all. He just wouldn’t. The idea is crazy!”

“When it comes to Sirius Black and your father, Professor Snape’s view of them tends to be somewhat irrational, but there is logic to his conclusion, Harry.”

“Oh? You mean aside from irrational and mental?”

“One which might help diffuse this situation for now,” McGonagall nodded.

“Okay? What possible reason – what logically possible reason is there for anyone to believe that Sirius trained me up to post-N.E.W.T. levels in potions?”

“Like most of the rest of our world, Harry, you disappeared from mind and memory for Professor Snape a little over three years ago when the Blood Wards Dumbledore cast upon you reached full strength when you and Clarice were reunited as a family. Now, as you may know, that effect is not unlike a memory charm and like a memory charm, a person tends to write over the empty space with inferences gleaned from unaffected memories. In many cases, this creates a false memory that to his mind covers over the gap, which is easier to accept than the gap itself.

“ So, you cease to exist three years ago and then reappear sometime in the last few months, figuratively speaking and as far as Professor Snape is concerned. Moreover, while he may have ‘forgotten’ about you for a time, your wards did not cover what happened with Sirius. Snape knows Sirius was exonerated and released from Azkaban and also now knows that Sirius’s release coincides with the approximate time you ‘disappeared,’ which is how he now remembers forgetting all about you for a time.

“As you know, Sirius has not been a fixture on the magical social scene. His employment with MI-5 is known only to a few of us. His marriage to Sophie and the birth of his daughter Emily never made the society pages of the Daily Prophet. For all practical purposes, and as far as Professor Snape is concerned, Sirius too disappeared not long after he was released from prison. Conclusion?”

“Sirius was raising me,” Harry said. “It’s not far from the truth...”

“Wouldn’t let Bob and Rose Granger know that,” McGonagall said with a smirk.

“Said it was not far from the truth,” Harry said. “He has been living with us the whole time and I see him as much as the Grangers. He and Sophie did spend my second summer in Japan as Student

Minders at the school. So, while inaccurate, that conclusion isn't totally mental. Still, it's a long way from that to today's Potions lesson."

"You can concede that a seven year old can be taught potions?" McGonagall asked.

"Of course," Harry replied. "I began potions at age seven."

"How many hours a week when you started?"

"I think it was three," Harry said.

"Which is the same you get here through O.W.L.s. Now, what might have happened if that were the only thing you were being taught over the last three years? Let's say, for example, instead of three hours a week and other course work as well, it was all you did? How far do you think you could have gotten in Potions in three years?"

"It's possible," Harry nodded. "Maybe not a Mastery ... definitely not as Sirius is not a Potions Master, but he did go beyond N.E.W.T.s in Potions as an Auror, just as we all did in Japan in our Defense Mastery. And," Harry paused. "And the post N.E.W.T. level questions were the kinds of questions a person who studied Potions for Auror or Defense would have been at least familiar with! But why would he even think that – I mean aside from the fact that I answered the questions? It doesn't really make sense."

"Professor Snape seems convinced that Sirius trained you up in Potions over the last three years specifically to embarrass him in class," McGonagall said.

"Okay, now that is mental. True, Potions is the one magic here in Britain that all witches and wizards learn and which can be taught before age eleven as it does not require a wand and cannot run afoul on the wand restrictions. But that seems like a lot of effort just for a prank."

“If you knew the history between your father, Sirius and Professor Snape, it might not seem so unbelievable. Your father and Sirius were in the same year in school as Professor Snape. Professor Snape was a Slytherin and your father and Sirius were Gryffindors, which would have been acrimonious in any event, but their ill will went far beyond the traditional intra-house hostility, even during those times. They started Hogwarts the fall after You-Know-Who and the Death Eaters became known publically, which only increased the intra-house tensions. Still, the feud between the Marauders and Professor Snape went above and beyond the Gryffindor, Slytherin thing of that day. It was only by a miracle – and perhaps due in no small part to your mother – that their fights did not result in serious injury. It seems your mother was the only person both sides would listen to and the only one who could get either to back down. Given some of the things that happened, and the lengths Sirius went to get at Professor Snape, it’s not that large of a leap to believe Sirius trained you in Potions to use you to humiliate him, at least if you view this from his perspective.”

“Seems it would take an exceedingly petty and callous person to think like that,” Harry said after some thought.

“As smart as Professor Snape is,” McGonagall said, “and he is very intelligent, when it comes to Sirius, petty and callous are what he is and what he assumes Sirius is.”

“Which means Professor Snape assumes my knowledge is limited to Potions and what Sirius could have taught me,” Harry nodded. “As long as I don’t prove him otherwise, he might do nothing?”

“As long as he thinks I am not standing in his way,” McGonagall said. “He’s not about to go to Dumbledore about a Sirius Black prank, especially if he can torment you in retaliation. If he thinks I am protecting you, he might well bring this to Dumbledore. Otherwise, he’ll settle for baiting you in class, docking you points and giving you detentions when he can. I’m sorry.”

“Great. So what do you suggest?”

“You mean aside from not costing our House fifty points per Potions lesson and effectively getting the entire First Year in detention every weekend? I am not sure Miss Perks can earn that many points a week every week.”

“Sorry.”

“What would you suggest you do in this situation?” McGonagall asked.

“He really as an irrational thing about Sirius?”

McGonagall nodded.

“That’s a huge blind spot,” Harry said thinking. “In a duel or a martial arts match, knowing that I’d exploit it as best I could. Sun Tzu would suggest I should let the enemy see what he wants to believe and not the true nature of things. So, that means I am the Potions product of my godfather’s twisted sense of humor, but otherwise am as magically clueless as any other first year.”

“That sounds like an idea,” McGonagall said.

“Anyone ever tell you you’re lucky?” Hermione huffed after hearing Harry’s description of his meeting with McGonagall.

Harry shrugged. “I never got stuck in detention in Japan,” he said.

“I meant that Snape has such tunnel vision,” she replied.

“Not something I would have counted on either,” Harry nodded, “but I’m not going to ignore it either.”

“Just don’t give him more reasons to keep us here,” Hermione said.

“That is not my plan.”

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

One of the problems Harry knew he might have in letting Snape see what he wanted to see was that unlike most eleven year olds, Harry had taught classes before. It was something he had done when working on his Masteries and had, in fact, taught N.E.W.T. level Potions during his third summer in Japan when he was working towards his Potions Mastery. Luna, Neville and Susan had been his students then. He had also taught potions tutorials at the Club on weekends and most all the Club members had been there for at least some lessons. He had already decided he was not going to fake this lesson and hoped that Snape would not notice and just assume he was lucky.

It was shortly after lunch and the Great Hall had been transformed into a Potions classroom of sorts. There were twenty tables that would seat two students each, which were already set up with cauldrons and the ingredients for the day's lesson. A large screen was behind Harry as he was going to use a projection charm he had learned in Japan, hoping Snape would not catch on. He watched patiently as the First Years filtered in, filling the rows of tables. He noted that the seven First Years who had most recently joined the Club were up front along with, to his surprise, Blaise Zabini who was seated with Theo Nott. The remaining First Years were interspersed with the exception of four of the five known as the Snake Pit, who had chosen seats in the back. Pansy Parkinson was seated elsewhere. He also noted that a few upper years were present too, probably out of curiosity as this was one of the more original detentions on record. Harry waited as Snape told the First Years that he expected them to treat this as a regular class and if Mr. Potter was as abysmal a teacher as Snape believed, he would not hold their performance against them but in the unlikely event he actually had something useful to teach, treating this as something other than a graded evolution would have consequences.

“Good afternoon everyone,” Harry began, “and welcome to my detention.”

It seemed most of the class laughed, although there were a few grumbles.

“For those of you who were not present when I was convicted – and as a refresher for those of you who were – I was told to teach a three hour lesson and I could teach whatever I wanted ‘so long as it’s relevant to potions and the class brews something.’ Well, I suppose we could talk about potions for a bit and then brew a cup of tea, but that’s being cheeky and if we have to be here for three hours, we might as well learn something.

“What I will present is an introduction to Potions. Now I would prefer a few classes on lab safety and ingredient preparation before actually asking you to brew away, but since brewing something is required, so much for that idea. We are going to make a potion and while doing so we will discuss the various categories of potions ingredients, the basics of how they interact and why they are important, and how they can go together.

“Now, while Professor Snape has his intro to this field of magical study, I have my own as well. I have lived most of my life in the non-magical world and have had a non-magical education until now. My favorite class in the non-magical world is Chemistry and one of the things I like to do at home is cook. There are elements to both in Potions and I dare say it is not nearly as huge a leap of intellect from that world to this as Spell casting.”

“I would beg to differ, Mr. Potter,” Snape replied. “Potions is perhaps the most exacting of magical studies.”

“I am not going to disagree with that statement. It is a field that calls for patience, a steady hand, precision and far more attention to detail than others,” Harry continued. “However, while the ability to invent and improve potions requires both magical intuition and a solid grounding in magical theories, making potions is not something that requires any inordinate degree of inherent magical ability.”

“Are you suggesting a Muggle could make a Potion?” Snape asked. “It is common knowledge that they cannot.”

“And this is based upon a detailed study, or an unsubstantiated superstition predicated upon a general belief? Are you not aware that many apothecaries and Potions Makers employ Squibs to make their potions?”

“Squibs are different,” Snape began.

“How so? They lack the ability to express magic. In that regard they are the same as Muggles. The only difference there for is they had at least one magical parent and were raised with knowledge of magic. Has there been any scientific, peer reviewed study that clearly demonstrates a difference between a Squib and a Muggle that would allow for the explanation that a Squib can make a potion following a set of instructions and a Muggle cannot? To your knowledge, has anyone even tried to determine whether a Muggle can make a viable potion?”

Snape was silent.

“It is not prudent to assume things as fact where it is possible to prove or disprove such assumptions,” Harry said. “That being said, it is prudent absent undeniable proof that something is impossible to assume that while it may be improbable, it is still within the realm of possibility.

“What we are going to make is a Potion that some call the Healer’s Best Friend. Anyone know what that is?”

There were several guesses before someone said “Blood Replenishing Potion.”

“Correct.” Harry said. To his surprise, the someone who was from Hufflepuff earned five points from Snape.

“Now, as I am sure Professor Snape will tell you, this is a N.E.W.T. level potion and thus you probably won’t need to make it for exams anytime soon. However, it is a forgiving potion and uses at least one



of every category of ingredient we shall discuss. Now, first off, you all have a beaker in front of you. Can anyone tell me what it contains?”

“Essence of Murlap,” a voice said.

“Indeed it is, very good. But I was looking for the general category of ingredient.”

After a pause, someone said “a liquid.”

“It is indeed, but the technical term?”

“A base,” another said.

“Correct. Now, if any of you read the first chapter in your books, you may recall that the definition of a potion is: ‘a liquid or semi-liquid substance made by combining and placing in solution magical ingredients in combination to create a desired magical effect when applied or ingested.’ Obviously, we need liquid to achieve that and we call the predominant liquid the Base. Now, what kind of Bases are there?”

“Water,” someone said.

“Correct. Water is known as a universal solvent because under the right conditions most things will dissolve in it. In Potions, the Base Class Water includes – well – water. We can use distilled water, which is water with absolutely nothing in it and salt water or sea water which obviously has various salts. Plant juice also falls in this category. They are obtained by squeezing the water out of plant material, but in this case the water includes sugars and other components from the plant itself. We can also include alcohols, which are made from fermentation of the sugars in a juice including mashes. If we then boil the fermented juice or mash and condense the vapor, we get a strong alcohol distillate. Finally, the juices can be magically tempered. That results in what we call an essence, such as what we will use today and, if we boil that and condense the vapors, we get what is known as a magical extract.

“Okay, another broad category of base?”

“Oils,” someone said.

“Correct. Oils can be plant or animal based, but they are both made up of fats. The one thing you should remember about oils for now is that they contain no water.

“Now, while waters and oils can be used as another category of ingredients, they are your primary Bases. There are two other categories of liquids, one of which we will use today. Can anyone name one?”

“Saps?” someone asked.

“Yes, that is one. It comes from plants. Basically, it is whatever oozes from a plant either with or without cutting. It usually is a combination of water, fats, sugars and other stuff. A simple way to remember the plant liquids is you do some squeezing to get the watery juice, a lot of squeezing to get the slippery oil, and just let it ooze for the gooey saps.

“Finally, there are the animal liquids which include blood, bile, venom and other things that are even nastier. We will be using one of those today.

“Now, while saps and animal liquids are occasionally used as a Base, they are far more commonly used as another category of ingredient. Right then, having covered Bases, take your beakers and empty them carefully into your cauldron.”

As Harry said this, a picture appeared on the screen which looked down upon Harry’s table and anyone who bothered could see him pouring his Essence of Murlap into his cauldron. He then instructed them on how to set a slow heating flame under it to start warming it up and how heat was a way to help things dissolve into solution. He then spent several minutes talking about the use of various Bases in potions as the students caldrons heated.

“Now the next ingredient we will be working with is the one that is closest to your cauldrons,” Harry began. It was a bunch of brown leaves that he said was Tinceron. He then showed the class how to crush and cut the leaves in the proper manner and noted most everyone watching the screen behind him. “Once it’s fairly pulverized, not quite a dust but not too chunky, measure out one full tablespoon of it and dump it in the cauldron. Then stir until the liquid turns a deep blue. It will take a few minutes.

“This ingredient is called our reactant. Your most basic potions contain a reactant dissolved in a base. The reactant is the primary ingredient that creates the desired magical effect, although in some potions, like this one, it won’t do it alone. In fact, this reactant will not properly dissolve on its own so we need to add a co-reactant to make it dissolve properly. Please hold up your hands when and if your solution looks like what is on the screen.”

Harry waited and in a few minutes he saw forty hands in the air. He then spent a few minutes talking about the properties of Tinceron and some of the other potions it was used to make. He then continued into the concept of co-reactants in general.

“Right then, on to our co-reactant to help our reactant into solution. You will see some small, white rocks next in line. And yes, it is chalk. Take them and place them in the ceramic bowl which is called a mortar. Then take the ceramic thing that looks like a tiny beaters bat and gently crush the rocks into a powder thusly,” and he began to demonstrate. “This bat looking thing is called a pestle.

“Once your chalk is a nice powder, begin stirring again slowly and take a pinch of the powder and sprinkle it slowly into the mixture. Keep slowly adding the powder until the liquid turns green then stop adding and stirring.”

He again asked for a show of hands when the class had reached this point. Once he saw forty hands in the air, he continued.

“Right then, our reactant is now in solution. However with some potions, like this one, even when dissolved in solution the reactant

will not react properly without a little help. It needs what we call a catalyst. For this potion, it's another ground up mineral powder, the small pile of red stuff that was next to your chalk. The mineral is actually rust or iron oxide and you grind the rust bits the same way you ground the chalk, but I decided to save you that step. Again, while stirring your potion, add the red dust until the potion turns white like milk and then stop."

Harry again asked for a show of hand when the class reached this point.

"Now, in N.E.W.T. Levels, we would probably discuss this next bit in excruciating detail. But as this is a First Year Intro, I'm just going to give you the summary. This potion actually has three different magical reactions that will occur. You won't actually see them, but they will happen and it's the combination of these reactions which will regenerate blood when it's ingested. Whenever you have more than one magical reaction occurring within a potion, there is a risk that one reaction will be stronger than it is supposed to be while another is weaker. The hard way to make sure everything happens as it is supposed to is through exceedingly precise measurements, exceeding pure ingredients and an exceedingly slow brewing process. Sometimes, there is no way around that. But in other cases, like ours today, there is one. It's a category of ingredient called a buffer.

"A buffer basically balances out the magical reactions. Now how it does that depends upon the ingredients and reactions at issue. What it does is effectively slow down or speed up the various reactions so that they occur at the desired rate. What we are going to use is powdered blowfish. This is basically the best bits of the fish that have been dried and powdered and it is best to obtain this from an apothecary rather than try and make it yourself. So, you'll find a tan powder on your tables. Again, as we did before, while stirring slowly add the powder until your potion turns yellow in color."

When forty hands were again in the air, Harry continued. "One thing you absolutely need to know about any potion and any potion ingredient is whether and when it is toxic. We've added a very useful buffer to our potions, but it is blowfish and anyone who knows

anything about blowfish knows it can be drop dead deadly stuff. Now, as this potion is supposed to replenish blood to keep someone whose been bleeding alive, poisoning them is not a good idea. So we need to counteract the toxins we've just added so that we won't make things worse for the eventual patient. And if any of you have any smart ideas about a prank, first of all your potions will be tested. Second of all, any that appear to pass will be used to stock our supplies in the Hospital Wing and the victim of your prank may be you.

“Our detoxifier is our next to last ingredient and it is a sap. You will find a plant pod...”

“But there's nothing after it,” someone pointed out.

“We'll get to that omission in a bit,” Harry said. “The detoxifier basically counter acts the toxins in the potion and makes it safe to use. Take the Tar Pod – that's what it's called – and squeeze it gently as you stir. A black goo will drip out slowly. Keep dripping and stirring until the potion turns white again, then stop dripping, but keep stirring until it returns to its former yellow color. Don't worry if you get an extra drop or two. As long as it turns white then yellow, you're good.”

When everybody seemed to indicate they had reached this point, Harry continued.

“Okay, as was pointed out, we seem to be short an ingredient. What we are missing is the activator. This is the final thing and will make this Blood Replenishing Potion replenish blood. For many, if not most of you, this is also the hardest step and not due to any technical stuff. You will find on your table a small metal lance. Our activator is five drops of our blood.”

Harry was not surprised that there were some gasps and protests. But, after several minutes most everyone had lanced their fingers and added the final ingredient and the others were allowed help either with the lancing or by using someone else's blood.

“Now comes the boring part,” Harry said. “We slowly stir our caldrons until the potion turns its final color, a deep blood red. This

will take a few minutes so don't get too upset. When your potion becomes blood red, blow out the flame and raise your hand so Professor Snape knows you are ready to have it tested."

A little over ten minutes later, Harry's potion was the first to turn red and he blew out his flame. Snape came over and waived his wand over the cauldron. "Acceptable," he drawled in a manner that might suggest he was thoroughly unimpressed. One by one, other students raised their hands and Snape preformed the same spell. One by one, it seemed, he continued to say "acceptable." Soon, only Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle and Runcorn were left.

"Ten points each from Slytherin," Snape said in a voice that for him was almost shouting. "Did I not tell you to treat this as a graded evolution?"

"You were serious?" Malfoy asked. "But this is Potter's detention!"

"I was serious, Mr. Malfoy, in the off chance he actually taught something. I have thirty-seven caldrons of Blood Replenishing Potion that suggests he got luck and four malcontents who did not bother to learn even what little he had to offer! Perhaps I should reconsider the detentions?"

"When my father," Malfoy began.

"Twenty additional points, you insufferable dunderhead and I can assure you your father will hear of this. You should expect a Howler from him in the next post advising you in no uncertain terms that when your Head of House tells you to do something, you do it. Now get out of my sight!"

Malfoy and the other three practically ran from the Great Hall.

"Mr. Potter," Snape said. "While I still suspect a Black influence, these potions are adequate. Please make sure the glass bottles them properly and see to it they are delivered to Madam Pomphrey. Then see to it this mess is cleared off."

“Yes Professor,” Harry replied.

With that Snape turned and left the Hall.

“That was bloody brilliant,” Ron Weasley said.

“Which part?” Millie asked him. “The lesson or the Malfoy bit?”

“Both,” Ron replied. “But the Malfoy bit especially.”

As the “class” was in the process of bottling their potions, Harry heard a voice from the back comment: “Best bloody potions lesson I’ve ever seen.” He looked up briefly and saw a large group of older students that had apparently gathered to watch the show that was now over.

## CHAPTER NINE: PRANKS

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when several people finally gathered in the "conference room" in the Club Corridor. It was almost a repeat of the previous Sunday, except for a handful of additions. The Club Member Prefects now include Lisa Morris, a Fifth Year Gryffindor with a "V 8990" on one of her collars and chevron, diamond and two bars on the other. Last week she was making sure the First and Second Years were all settled in while Percy attended the meeting. The Faculty group now included Madam Pomphrey who had been finally brought over by the thirty-six vials of expensive Blood Replenishing Potion and a lengthy discussion with fellow Healer Clarice. Susan Bones was also in attendance as she was a three summer student as well.

"First off," McGonagall said, "I want to say that I did witness much of Harry's most invigorating lesson yesterday. All I can say, Harry, is well done."

"Thank you," Harry replied.

"Needless to say, the aftermath has been keeping me both on my toes and very busy," McGonagall went on. "Dumbledore was here earlier. That was not a surprise as he did say he would stop by on Sunday's to make sure the school had not burned down in his absence. Honestly, I think he really meant that. Nothing was said about what happened yesterday. I think Professor Snape could not bring himself to admit his little plan to humiliate Mr. Potter was such a resounding failure. As no one else brought it up, Dumbledore has no idea that it even happened."

"Thank Merlin for small favors," Neville said.

"What was discussed?" Percy asked.



“He was here for over an hour and I can sum up the school business we discussed with one word: nothing. There was but one topic he went on about, for it was not so much a discussion as a rant. It was the ongoing selection for Minister. Despite fourteen hour days, they are no further along now than they were a week ago. Dumbledore figures that it might be Christmas before anything really happened. He said the only thing that makes it remotely interesting were a couple of wand duels on the floor of the Wizengamot, which led to a no wand rule, which led to fist fights the next day. He said he cannot yet afford to continue as Headmaster in any capacity unless – how did he put it?”

“Either the school burns down,” Flitwick said, “the students run off, grievous bodily harm or death shall occur, or...”

“The Vogons arrive to clear it away for a hyperspace bypass,” Sprout said.

“What?” several voices asked.

“Apparently, when he is not needed to break up a fight, our esteemed Headmaster has decided to spend his time reading the works of Douglas Addams,” McGonagall said. “Basically, it means that for the foreseeable future I am Headmistress. He apparently posted a letter both to the Board of Governors and Ministry Board of Education to such effect requesting any inquiries normally addressed to him as Headmaster be sent to my attention, at least until we have a new Minister”

“Congratulations, Acting Headmistress,” Hermione beamed.

“Just because I’ve known you your whole life, do not expect me to treat you any different than any other student – well, than any other Club Member student, Hermione.”

“You never have,” Hermione said, “and I mean that in a good way.”

“That gives us three,” Harry said nodding.

“Excuse me?” McGonagall asked.

“With you as Acting Headmistress, three of the six schools are now headed by Club Faculty Representatives: Sir Ian McGregor at St. Andrews, Professor Malloy at St. Patrick’s and now you.”

“Four and maybe five,” McGonagall said.

“Excuse me?”

“We had a Faculty Rep meeting Friday night when you were here preparing for that wonderful lesson, Harry. Professor Elaine Walsh was promoted to Head Mistress of St. Alban’s over the summer. Professor Mason from Preston Academy said that the Headmaster, a Mr. Swift, has had ‘one final encounter’ with the Ministry Board and is now clearly of the opinion that education is broken.”

“Recruitment?” Hermione asked.

“That’s our thinking,” McGonagall said. “Our MI-5 friends think it is advisable.”

“And with St. George’s Deputy Head as Club Rep, faculty cover will be from the top at all schools for the foreseeable future,” Harry finished. “Might want to consider changing the scheduling for Senior W.I.S.E. League play.”

“How so?” McGonagall asked.

“After the first season, I saw the League as a feature of this Club we could make public without risking the rest. It’s already funded and fielding teams at the Senior Level. Sooner or later, I was hoping to change the game venue.”

“To where?”

“To each school’s home pitch,” Harry said. “The Championship game, well if we went public we’d need a neutral site and I don’t think

Camp W is an option. But the League games would be at the schools. I envisioned six games, three at your home pitch and three at the other school's pitch with each team playing what has become its arch rival twice. For Hogwarts, that seems to be St. George's in London. Preston and St. Alban's is another as they are regional neighbors and get students from the west of England. St. Patrick's and St. Andrews is the third as they both have students from Northern Ireland..."

"This wouldn't have anything to do with the Troubles there the Muggles are having?" McGonagall asked.

"Forgot about that," Harry said. "It seemed logical. We could always change the two game schools every year. That would just the pairings for the first season, whenever that is."

"And game attendance?" Dora asked.

"The schools would have to allow students from the other school as well as parents and families from both to attend, just like we have at Camp W the last couple of years."

"Dumbledore would never allow that," Sprout observed.

"But he's not here, is he?" Harry remarked. "Once the games are going, he would look stupid to try and stop them, wouldn't he?"

"Hogwarts Headmaster Afraid to Play," Luna said. "Not a nice headline."

"After the enlightened vision of Acting Headmistress McGonagall saw Britain's flagship magical school field a Quidditch team in the new National School League, Professor Dumbledore has withdrawn the school from the W.I.S.E. League citing security concerns. As most readers know, the security at Hogwarts School is supposed to be second to none, yet apparently is not up to the challenge of Quidditch. The Quibbler has heard from anonymous sources who know the situation at Hogwarts that the real reason for the withdrawal is Dumbledore's concern that his school might actually lose which

would undermine its reputation as the bastion of education in these isles..." Luna continued. "It would not go well for him."

"Anything that knocks his ego down to size must be considered a good thing," Hermione added, "within reason, of course. This is within reason. Are we going to stop with Quidditch?"

"What do you mean?" Flitwick asked.

"Well, we didn't have Quidditch in Japan. We had Muggle sports. We had boys and girls teams in Football (Soccer), Basketball, Ice Hockey, Swimming, Track and Field and Martial Arts. Girls had Field Hockey and boys had Cricket. There were other sports, but those are the ones our British students played."

"And we could compete against Muggle teams," Neville said.

"Wouldn't that reveal our world?" Sprout asked.

"If we joined their leagues it might," Neville replied. "But if we only 'appeared' in national playoff or competitions, maybe not. Harry has an idea about that."

"Each school could have a 'double' athletic facility in the Muggle World," Harry said. "We'd have one here for practice and W.I.S.E League competition and another one say at Inverness for Muggle games."

"Sounds expensive," McGonagall said.

"Actually, we could build facilities at all six schools using magic for less than the cost of sending twenty students to Japan for the summer. The Foundation could easily afford it," Harry said. "The Muggle facilities would be more expensive and take longer to build, but again it's not cost prohibitive. I checked last spring. We could have the school facilities built within a year from the word 'go.' The Muggle facilities would take longer."

“How much longer?” McGonagall asked.

“Land is the first problem,” Harry said. “We’d need to buy a fair bit. Once we have the land, say about two years to construct.”

“Would there be interest in such things?” Sprout asked.

“Yes,” Olivia Adair said, “at least from those of us in the Club. We all did sports in Japan. And think about it; maybe one day Hogwarts will be known as one of the best schools in all of Britain, not just the magical parts, at least in sports.”

“Long term stuff,” Harry said. “We got other problems now. But years from now? We can begin with Quidditch and begin working towards that day. Quidditch is something we can do now.”

“Any other grand plans?” Sprout asked earnestly.

“Education,” Harry said. “We should not have to go to Japan to get a decent education. We should be able to do that here. Now, I am not proposing a time compressed summer school like we have done. The Japanese and several other countries are able to provide that to many of their kids without time manipulation. Then again, they also start a lot earlier than we do and keep going long after we are expected to finish and get jobs. Again, there’s a lot that has to happen here before we reach that goal. For now, we’re stuck with Japan.”

“Speaking about education,” Olivia Adair said, “Harry’s little display yesterday has resulted in some surprising inquiries.”

“Really?” Harry asked.

Olivia nodded. “Right now I have seventeen Slytherins in the Club excluding myself. Now, it depends upon whether we include upper years or not, but I’ve been asked by several people whether they could join up.”

“Do they know...?” Harry began.

“Nothing specific,” Olivia said. “They don’t know about Japan. They do know we know more than they do and it’s clear we’re not the only ones. They also know if they have any issue at all with Muggle Borns and such, they need not ask. These are fence sitters for lack of a better term. They are clearly not part of the Future Death Eaters of Britain lot, but did not join earlier. Typical Slytherins, they want what is best for them but won’t stick their necks out.”

“What are our current numbers?” Madam Pomphrey asked.

“Right now Year 88 had three,” Hermione began looking at some notes. “Year 89 had four, Year 90 had fifty and year 91 had thirty-four. That’s a total of ninety-one who have between one and four years in Japan.”

“By House,” Dora followed, “that’s thirty-one Gryffindors, twenty Puffs, twenty-two Ravenclaws and, well Olivia already said eighteen Slytherins. By year its: twenty-two First Years, eighteen in Second, nineteen Thirds, fifteen Fourth Years, twelve in their O.W.L. Year and one Seventh, that being me.”

“So some Slytherins have asked about joining?” McGonagall asked.

“At least one from every year excluding Seventh Years,” Olivia nodded. “Fourteen in all. All of them are the types who, while ambitious, are from families that did not support You-Know-Who or his idiotic ideas. That would give us thirty-two out of a hundred. Considering we held our own with far less, Slytherin might become a decent place to stay.”

“The First Years?” Hermione asked.

“The Zabini boy,” Olivia said. “Family emigrated from Italy about seven years ago I think. It was certainly after the War.”

“Any other houses express an interest?” McGonagall asked?

“I’ll say,” Percy replied. “In Gryffindor, including Miss Perks who we ‘picked up’ on the train here thus giving us all the Firsties, there are twenty-eight others through Sixth Year who expressed an interest. That would give us fifty-nine out of a hundred and two. To be honest, I was surprised it’s not more.”

“Why didn’t they do it last year?”

“My guess is they preferred to sleep in on weekends or something,” Percy shrugged.

“And now?”

“While I’d love to say it is my unmatched charm,” Percy said, “overall brilliance and dashing good looks – least that’s what Penelope is always saying – truth is having Harry in the House and the Club and what he did to Professor Snape are probably the real reasons.”

“Huffelpuff?” McGonagall asked.

“Including our two Muggle Borns from the train, thirty-nine First through sixth years which would give us fifty-nine out of ninety-nine. We almost tripled!” Edgar Jacoby said. “As for why? I can say that last year the House opinion was that getting educated outside of Hogwarts was disloyal. And no, they do not know about Japan. All they know is we go somewhere else on weekends for additional lessons of some sort. I guess people now associate that sort of loyalty with loyalty to Professor Snape, who treats us almost as bad as the Gryffindors.”

“And Ravenclaw?”

“Four Muggle Born firsts and twenty-nine Second through Sixth Years,” Penelope Clearwater said. “Would give us fifty-five out of one hundred and two. If you want a why, it’s probably Professor Snape, O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s.”

“From less than a quarter to a little over half of the entire school in the Club,” McGonagall sighed. “It would seem that our colleague brings out at least some kind of passion in his students. Can we handle that from a security standpoint?”

Dora nodded. “I think so. Two years ago I was the only member of the Hogwarts crew who had been to Japan. I had to watch over fifty others. Now, the Japan crowd would only be outnumbered by fourteen students instead of a ratio of fifty to one. We have more room in this wing than the single classroom we used back then. I think we can manage.”

“If we’re about to double in size,” Harry said, “I think we should let the other schools know. I’d be curious if there’s increased interest there as well. We might even want to encourage it.”

“Why?” a couple of voices asked.

“First of all, we have four hundred students; they each have about six hundred. I prefer rather equal representation if possible which means if we’re about to jump to two hundred, they should have about three hundred each in the Club in an ideal world. Every child who goes to Japan is one less witch or wizard the government can cower later. Every family that has a child in the Club is one less family that is willing to accept things as they are. The larger the Club, the less the Ministry can do to interfere should they find out what really is going on.”

“How soon do we want to know?” Neville asked.

“Final Club rosters will be set the weekend of the twenty-eighth,” Harry replied. “Those on our rolls at that time will be the ones going to Japan next summer.”

“I note you did take our new First Year members when you lot came over yesterday evening,” Dora said.

Harry nodded. “After 'Fun With Snape' yesterday, we thought it was best to get them out of the Castle for a spell.”



“Speaking about our new Muggle Borns,” Hermione said, “are we going to find out if any of them have a connection to the Time Chamber?”

“You think any of them are adopted?” McGonagall asked.

“I don’t know. Even if they were, they may not have been told. Remember, had it not been for an unexpected series of events a few years ago, my Mum and Dad were going to wait until I was eighteen to tell me. It’s possible.”

“I’ll post a letter to Remus in the morning,” McGonagall said.

“Remus?” Harry asked. “I thought you usually did that.”

“I did. But as I am now acting Headmistress, I won’t have the time. Besides, Remus has the eye of the young witch in the Records Office.”

“Really?” Clarice said. “Oh do tell!”

“That will have to wait,” McGonagall said with a smile. “For now, I think we should call it a night.”

Sally-Anne stared up at the ceiling as she lay in bed contemplating the last week. It was hard to imagine it had only been a week since she set foot on that train in London which had brought her here to a very different place and what was becoming a very different life. She was already beginning to think of her life as “before Hogwarts” and “after Hogwarts;” although perhaps the word “Club” would be more appropriate.

She had boarded that train a week ago, leaving a life that had been far from perfect. Her parents pretty much had left her alone for ages and she really had not known why until recently. She ate meals with them, but that was about it. At her old school, she never really had any good friends and was never invited over for a party or anything

really. If anyone in her class was going to be left out of something, it was always Sally-Anne.

She never truly understood why. She was not stupid. She was neither too rich nor too poor or in any way stood out too much from the other kids, which was almost always a way to get noticed and left out of things. She thought she was normal enough, but she was always on the outside looking in.

She had learned about magic almost two months ago and learned she was a real, live witch and immediately began to wonder if that was the reason why she was alone so much. Maybe she didn't fit in because she couldn't. She had come to hope that going to a magical school with other kids would mean she would be normal, whatever that had meant.

At first, she was convinced the day she got on the train would be the worst day of her life. She had left her parents with a letter they told her not to open until the train was on its way. She was expecting ... well, not what she got. It told her they never wanted to see her again and that she was evil as was all magic. She had not even recovered from the shock when that Draco Malfoy and his friends found her and started teasing her and putting her down for just about everything including breathing. It looked like being magical might well be worse than anything before as bad as that was.

Then a couple of older students showed up and did something to Malfoy and his lot using magic. They sent the boy and his friends away with their (most likely forked) tails between their legs and told her not to worry about that lot. They took her to the back of the train, along with some other kids her own age who, she found out, were a lot like her in many ways. They too had only recently learned about magic and such and they too had not had many, if any friends before. She was, however, the only one that she knew of whose parents had abandoned at the train station.

But ever since she had been led to the back of that train, things had gotten better. She now found herself in a room with five other girls, two of whom had lived as Muggles and had similar stories of not having friends before they met magical children such as themselves.

All five she now considered her friends and they went out of their way at times to help her. From them she had learned all about this Club they were all in and her new friends made sure she did well in her classes “for now.” It was understood that she would be going to this other school in Japan over the summer somehow. She did not know how as she doubted her parents would pay for it or even give her permission. But she was told not to worry about such details; details which included where she would be staying if her parents were serious about never seeing her again when she was not here at Hogwarts. It would all be worked out in plenty of time.

Classes were interesting and it helped that she was racking up points, even if her new friends helped a bit. She was also learning other things not taught in those classes such as wandless magic and something called mind magic. It was all so new that she barely understood any of it, but it was also so cool. She really liked Transfiguration and Charms as you actually got to do real magic in them. Herbology and Astronomy were pretty good because she liked the teachers. She was bored out of her mind with History and that (real) ghost who taught it, but her friends said not to worry about it because it was a rubbish course. She did not like Defense or Potions. The material seemed interesting enough, but her Defense teacher was terrible and no one could understand him and her Potions teacher was just scary.

But even that seemed to be working out. That Harry Potter had really taught a good Potions class and she learned that the Club would be offering its own classes in Potions soon so its members would not have to worry about things. She had also learned that Defense might well be one of the most important things they studied and, fortunately, it was a big thing in the Club so the fact that her teacher was terrible would not be a problem later on.

After that Potions Lesson, she and all the other First Years in the Club were taken to another place for the remainder of the Weekend. It was like a huge school although they called it a Camp. There she met kids who were going to magical school all over Britain and Ireland. Well, maybe not all over as there were only five other schools, but it sure seemed like that to her. She met three kids who were attending Preston Academy which they said was near York who were

from Nottingham where she had lived. At first, she thought that was so cool that there were other kids like her from her city. Then she remembered that she might not be going back. Still, it was fun to talk about the places they all knew growing up there.

They had an orientation of sorts, been assigned rooms for when they spent the night and issued clothes. The Camp had several buildings which included class rooms, large lounges, a huge dining hall, a theater (she wondered if they showed pictures), and an athletic facility, among other things. Hogwarts had its own lounge off the main one as did all the other schools. It was not just for Hogwarts, of course, but it was where all the Hogwarts stuff was displayed. There were pictures on the wall of the Hogwarts sports teams, a trophy the “Juniors” had won the year before, awards the Hogwarts students had earned at the school in Japan; it was a lot to take in. But it was fun too.

Thinking about it as she drifted off to sleep, she was beginning to think this magical stuff would actually lead to a “normal” life for her. After all, next weekend her entire room (including her!) would be spending there evenings at the house in London where Hermione and Clarice lived. It was going to be the first time she had been invited to anyone’s house before on her own!

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.**

The morning air in the Great Hall filled with scores if not hundreds of owls, as it did almost every morning, for it was mail call. It was the one thing that Sally-Anne Perks could not truly participate in since she rather expected her parents would not be sending her any letters. But she always got a chance to look at the papers or magazines her friends were getting and besides, right now the only people she really would like letters from were in the room.

To her surprise, two owls landed in front of her. Sally-Anne was unsure of what to make of this turn of events. She knew what the other kids would do. They would remove the envelope affixed to the bird’s leg and give it a small piece of bacon and then read their letters. But who would be writing to her? She was fairly certain it could not be

her parents. They had made their feelings and position abundantly clear and were not the sort of people who were likely to change their minds once they had made them up.

“Well,” a voice said. She looked up from the birds at the source and saw Lavender sitting across from her. “Go on. It appears they are for you, Sally-Anne.”

Sally-Anne nodded and removed the envelopes one by one, giving the messenger their bacon and watching in stunned silence as the birds flew off to wherever they went after making a delivery. Both the letters clearly had “Sally-Anne Perks, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Gryffindor House,” written upon the envelopes.

“No return address?” She asked.

“It’s not exactly like Muggle Post,” Clarice said. “Since the birds know who sent it, if it can’t be delivered they just fly back.”

“Oh,” she said as she opened the first letter.

“So? Who’s it from?” Lavender asked.

“Jill,” Sally-Anne said. “Jill Ambrose. Odd. I mean she and I went to school together back in Nottingham but were in different classes and ... oh my! She’s at Preston’s! Says she heard I was here from one of the kids I met on Sunday and...”

“Well, you were encouraged to make friends from outside Hogwarts as well, weren’t you?” Lavender said.

Sally-Anne nodded and wiped a tear from her eye. The words “friends” and “as well” in the same sentence were what she had hoped for all her life but more than she had thought possible. Her thoughts were interrupted by a loud howl from a couple of tables over.

“Someone’s got a Howler!” a voice observed from further down her table.

The voice was berating whoever it was in no uncertain terms and threatening all sorts of terrible things. "And if you think I would take the word of an eleven year old over that of a respected friend and member of the faculty who is also your Head of House, then you do indeed have a lot to learn! Rest assured, Draco, you will learn! Your mother is still young enough to bear a replacement!"

"Ouch!" someone said, "that had to hurt."

"What?" Sally-Anne asked.

"Whoever that kid is, he's someone's heir and has just been told he can be replaced," an older student said.

"Guess we now know what happens when Draco tells his father," Ron Weasley chuckled. "Been threatening to do that all last week as I recall."

"On a scale of one to ten..." one of the Weasley twins began.

"I'd give that one a five," the other finished.

"No one can compare to our Mum for the artistic quality of her Howlers," the first finished.

"Not to mention deafening volume and ear piercing screech," the other added.

"Which reminds me," the first one said, "it would seem we've had a Howler free year thus far, Fred."

"We have been remiss indeed, George."

"A whole week has gone by and it seems we have not been mentioned in dispatches."

"Mum will think we're asleep on the job."

“Merlin forbid she is left to believe that we’ve turned over a new leaf...”

“Reformed...”

“Seen the error of our ways...”

“Feel remorse for our youthful indiscretions...”

“Or worse, come to believe we are competing to get Percy’s job.”

“We have been most derelict in our duties, George.”

“Indeed we have, and here comes the little Pureblood git now, Fred.”

“Boxers or briefs, do you suppose?”

“Boxers.”

Sally-Anne looked and saw the three boys who were tormenting her on the train walking up the aisle between the Gryffindor and Ravenclaw tables, which were on either side of the center of the hall. The boys stopped and the blonde turned to the Ravenclaw table where some First Years were laughing.

“Shut your mouth, you filthy little Mudblood whore!” he yelled. Sally-Anne could not tell if it was Su Li or Morag McDougal the boy was addressing so rudely. He began to continue up the aisle and again stopped as the way was blocked by the Weasley twins. “Out of our way, Blood Traitors,” the boy said as if expecting obedience.

“My, my, Fred,” George said, “seems this midget Firstie has a mouth on him.”

“A potty mouth at that,” Fred nodded.

“Pity we never bothered to learn Mum’s household cleaning spells.”

“Clear off, you beggars!” the boy said. “And don’t you look at me, Mudblood!” It was clear he directed this comment at Hermione and Sally-Anne saw Harry attempt to get up, but it was clear Hermione was holding him back.

“I will have you know,” Hermione said, “that I can trace my magic back a thousand years or more.”

“Halfblood, then,” Malfoy sneered, “Like there’s any difference!”

“At least she wasn’t disowned,” Harry added.

“Who asked you? When I want an opinion from low life scum like you, I’ll tell you it!”

“And here it is,” George said, “not a minute after this ickle Firstie gets a howler reminding him to mind his elders...”

“Which would be us.”

“Superiors...”

“Us again.”

“And betters...”

“Three for three.”

“And he already seems to have forgotten his lesson.”

“Perhaps some reinforcement is indicated?”

“Indeed I do believe it is, Fred.”

“This being an institution for learning,” Fred added.



Two wands seem to come from nowhere and there was a flash of smoke and light that momentarily enveloped Malfoy and his goons. As it cleared, the twins looked at each other in mild surprise and then began inspecting their wands as if looking for a flaw.

“That was unexpected,” Fred said.

“And disconcerting,” George added looking at his wand.

Sally-Anne soon saw why as Lavender started wailing covering her eyes as if in pain: “Scarred! I’m scarred for life!” and scores of others were howling with laughter. Draco and his goons were naked.

“That was not supposed to happen,” Fred said looking at his wand.

Draco seemed to realize something was really off and looked down. He turned red and began sprinting for the exit with naked versions of Crabbe and Goyle hard on his heels. Almost immediately, Percy was standing behind his brothers and McGonagall had seemed to appear at their front.

“Explain yourselves!” McGonagall said to the twins who seemed genuinely surprised; not at McGonagall, but about the effect of their spells.

“If I may, Professor,” Percy said.

She nodded.

“Malfoy was hurling invective and bigoted epithets quite literally left and right as he came up the aisle. I can only assume that my brothers merely sought to correct such clearly antisocial and disruptive behavior using a spell I created my First Year.”

Sally-Anne could swear she saw an amused smirk on McGonagall’s face.

“As you are aware, Professor,” Percy continued, “that spell is designed to remove outer clothing only?”

“That’s what we thought as well,” George said at least somewhat contritely.

“Obviously, that’s not what happened,” McGonagall said in as stern a voice as she could muster.

“It would seem my brother forgot the moral of that tale, Professor.”

“Not to hex people in the Great Hall,” McGonagall nodded in agreement.

“No Professor,” Percy said with a smirk. “They forgot that it seems Slytherin seems to be an underwear optional House.”

“Eeeew!” several girls seemed to squeal while much of the student body was again howling in laughter.

Again, McGonagall seemed to smirk just a bit. “Be that as it may – and one would hope like minded students now know the need for proper undergarments – that will be ten points from Gryffindor each, two night’s detention and I will be writing to your mother.”

“Malfoy deserved it,” Harry observed.

“He may have indeed,” McGonagall said, “but there were no accusations as to the other two. It was for what happened to them when all they were guilty of is a poor choice of a friend that warranted the punishment.”

“And Malfoy?” Percy asked.

“Thirty points for his language,” McGonagall said, “and as docking points seems to have little effect, I think a month’s detention should do as well.”

“Some places would expel him,” Harry noted.

“ Unlike some places, where participation is purely voluntary, attendance here is compulsory. Mr. Malfoy’s behavior is not sufficiently egregious to warrant such penalty.”

Oddly, Sally-Anne thought, the twins actually smiled at that.

“Looks like you got your work cut out for you today,” Lavender said to Sally-Anne.

“Me?” she asked in surprise, “but what did I do?”

“Nothing. But we need to make up twenty points now, don’t we?”

The event in the Great Hall at breakfast had interrupted the normal morning ritual amongst the students of reading their post. Harry left the table for Herbology with two unopened letters in his robes and was not able to get to them until he finally flopped down on a couch in the Club Corridor following a nap in History of Magic that afternoon. Astronomy had been rescheduled for late that evening as the skies were supposed to be clear. Looking into his pocket, he withdrew a letter from Lord Black first.

Dear Harry:

My grandson has provided the necessary protections to our place... Harry knew this meant there was more to this letter than met the eye at first. ...but such things aside, I was pleased to hear you and Clarice were sorted into Gryffindor. It was a pity all my relations were not so honored. Looking forward to exchanging Hogwarts tales over the Holidays.

AB.

Harry drew one of his wands and pointed it at the parchment. “I solemnly swear I am up to no good,” he intoned and watched as the writing changed.

Quite useful this is. I am keenly aware of how public things can be at your school and there are times when such communication should not be known to all.

I wanted to thank you for what happened at the Station. You correctly assessed a situation which may well have ended badly for me and House Black. Mr. Malfoy was quite put out that I had disowned his family and most notably his son. He was even more upset to learn I would not “be reasoned with” to use his phrase. He assumed quite incorrectly that I and my House were supporters of his agenda and when I would not listen to reason, deemed it necessary to “change my mind.” I can only guess at what he was attempting when he was struck from behind by your spell.

You should know that his actions have been reported to the proper authorities who are keeping an uncomfortably close eye on him as he has learned to his chagrin. DMLE has placed him on a suspect list meaning whenever anything happens and the perpetrator is not apprehended at the scene, Mr. Malfoy is among those who shall be hauled in for questioning. The official word of the incident on the platform is that Mr. Malfoy was in his cups and passed out from a night of overindulgence. But we know what happened, and again I thank you for your keen observation and quick thinking.

Good luck and dare I say good hunting!

Grandfather.

“Mischief managed,” Hermione said after reading the letter once Harry was finished. “That was nice of him.”

Harry nodded in agreement as he opened his second letter from Sirius.

Hiya Kiddo!

Great on you and Clarice getting into Gryffindor! Hope you’re not getting into too much mischief!

Sirius.

Again with the hints, Harry thought as he pointed his wand at Sirius's letter.

Okay, so let me get this straight. And I'm sorry if the writing is sloppy, but I haven't had a laugh like that in a long time!

So, Snivellus tried to trip YOU up in Potions and you wiped the floor with his greasy mop twice in the first lesson? (Once when he couldn't ask a question you couldn't answer and again when he made you and the class make a potion in less time than necessary and MOST of you lot made it anyway?) I would have LOVED to see his face turn several colors as it surely did!!

And McGonagall is convinced that Snivey's convinced that you only knew what you knew because I taught you just to stick it to him? THAT'S BLOODY BRILLIANT!! Too bad I didn't think of it to begin with!

And then he sets you up with a detention where Mr. So Called Know It All had to teach a class? Good thing the hydrophobic fool didn't know you had to teach Potions as part of your Mastery program. And according to McGonagall, rather than live down to his low expectations, you actually taught a proper class, perhaps too well as half the school is flocking to the Club?

Mooney and I are so proud!

A prank that would have done the old Marauders proud.

What am I saying? It exceeds anything we ever pulled on anyone, including Snivellus ... and no, Mooney, I'm not going to tell him that one!

This is just too good! I'll be sending you loads of Potions books (and Mooney is working on some "instructional material.") Don't be shy about letting Snivelly see it!

A prank that can keep on pranking! Love it!

Padfoot.

Harry rolled his eyes as he handed the letter to Hermione. When she had finished, she looked at him.

“To be honest,” Harry said, “I would much rather have been ignored.”

“We have heard there was some kind of history between Snape and the Marauders,” Hermione said.

“That was ages ago, Hermione. And what does that have to do with me? I wasn’t even born then!”

Hermione shrugged. “It does seem quite juvenile.”

“And it seems Padfoot is intent on keeping it that way for now,” Harry sighed. “Then again, if it keeps Snape away from what we really are and are really doing, maybe we should not look a gift horse in the mouth.”

“Just don’t run it in too much,” Hermione began.

“Not intending to,” Harry said. “I’ll let him see me with some odd potion book or another and if Padfoot sends me ‘instructions,’ perhaps get some of them confiscated or something. Enough to keep in his blind spot. Not enough to provoke. Then again, maybe I’ll just lie low a bit.”

“Oh?”

“We have no idea how little or much it will take to set the man off. I’d rather not find out an answer to that question until the answer no longer matters. I mean, even though we know they haven’t looked, we also know all our exam results and certifications are on file with the I.C.W.”

“And Dumbledore is the Chief Mugwump...”

“Who until now has no reason to use his position to check into the scores of some students. He could do so as Headmaster as well, ‘cept he isn’t right now. Snape, on the other hand cannot check those records without the permission of the Headmaster or our parents.”

“Or in our case ourselves,” Hermione nodded. One of the concerns about the club was those records. Fortunately, as ‘minors,’ those records were extremely hard to get access to for the vast majority of people. The rules limited it to Headmasters for children attending their schools, official I.C.W., a request by a student or the student’s parent or guardian, or use or situations where the records were needed to verify the person’s credentials. Basically, their records could not become available to anyone just because they were curious. In most cases, they had learned, the I.C.W. was only required to release those records when the person whose records were at issue was applying for a job that required proof of accreditation. Even the Headmaster’s curiosity, alone, was not enough. Most Headmaster inquiries occurred only on school transfers or if the “local” records were lost or appeared to have been falsified. In all cases, a person requesting those records had to provide a lengthy justification for the request; in most cases with supporting documentation of anything they claimed justified release.

There were only a handful of people who could peruse such records with little cause. This included the people who recorded and filed the records in the I.C.W. offices, the examination board (but with the students’ names redacted), and the Supreme Mugwump himself and certain designated assistants. The more Harry had learned about Dumbledore, the more this exception concerned him. However, he was almost certain that Dumbledore would not track such details on a whim. The Prime Minister could, in theory, inquire into the amount of public funds a government office in Bristol spent on a weekly basis on bog rolls. It was within his authority. But one did not dwell in such minutiae when one was paid to look at the big picture. There just were not enough hours in a lifetime for such detail mongering. Thus, unless given a reason, Harry was fairly certain Dumbledore had not and would not check those records. Even then, it was likely his search would be focused on a handful of individuals – such as Harry

– and not pick up on the hundreds of other records out there on hundreds of other British students.

To be honest, Harry was not the least bit concerned for himself. He had his four Masteries and those Masteries were unassailable. He was not even concerned for the nine hundred and twenty-six others who were in Japan last summer. Their I.C.W. scores could not be challenged and one of the skills they all knew, shifting, meant they could travel to and from Japan with impunity. If all of them wanted four summers of education, they could get it and there was little or nothing that could be done without raising a hue and cry from the public. (Basically, the only way to stop them was to lock them in a prison with an anti-shifting ward. This was not likely as shifting was not known in Britain or Europe and thus the local warders would not know how to ward against it.) His concerns were for people like Sally-Anne and others who had yet to get their chance to go to Japan. It was for them that the security was in place and that the Club was secret from those who might oppose it and its goals within the halls of power.

“The day may be fast approaching when we needn’t worry about such things,” Harry said.

“And your Quidditch idea,” Hermione said. “Aren’t you afraid that’s close to tickling the sleeping dragon?”

“If it were not for the fact that this country’s mad about the sport and I suspect the press will go gaga for the idea of a national youth league, I might agree with you. But my guess is that if we make the W.I.S.E. League public, the press and public will think it the most brilliant idea since socks.”

Hermione nodded. The truth was that by way of comparison, Muggle Britons were practically apathetic about football if they were compared on the rabid fan meter against Magical Britons and Quidditch. She had seen just how absorbed the magicals were with that sport. If anyone really wanted a comparison, more ink was spent in the Daily Prophet on all things Quidditch than everything else



combined. A newsstand in Diagon Alley had five times as many Quidditch related materials than any other topic and only Teen Witch Weekly ever outsold a Quidditch magazine (and then only with their annual “Who’s Hot” young wizard special.)

Take, for example, the Weasleys. If you ever wanted a heated discussion, get them started on Quidditch. The Twins didn’t really care about any teams. They were all on about beaters and records involving concussions and broken limbs. Percy was not into any one team, but probably knew more obscure statistics than anyone ought to know. Ginny was a huge fan of the Holyhead Harpies (as it was the only all girl team), and Puddlemere United (because they were actually pretty good.) Ron, on the other hand, practically worshiped the Chuddeley Cannons, arguably the worst organized professional sports franchise in human history. They had not won a League title in anyone’s lifetime. They had not made the playoffs since before the Muggle Second World War. They had not finished higher than dead last in thirty years and had not won a match in five years. They held loads of records of the most dubious nature such as most consecutive losses, greatest margins of defeat, most players struck by lightning during a match, having the only player eaten by a dragon during regulation. They played in the longest match in history, which should have been a forfeit in their favor because only two of the opposing players showed up (it was during an outbreak of Dragon Pox), and they still lost. In 1953, the entire team took a wrong turn flying to their match in Ireland and disappeared (it was assumed they flew out over the Atlantic and given how well they were led, could not decide what to do when they lost sight of land.) Yet to hear Ron, they were but a minor tweak away from the League title every year.

“Have you guys seen this,” Clarice called out breaking Hermione from her musings. She was holding a copy of The Daily Prophet and was handing it to Hermione. Hermione began to read and could sense Harry reading over her shoulder. Anyone else would have received a rebuke, but she had never minded when it was Harry.

“An attempted robbery at Gringotts?” Harry asked.

“Well, more like a burglary,” Hermione said. “A robbery is when you threaten them and take their money. A burglary is when you sneak in to steal it without anyone knowing, which is what looks like what happened here.”

“Then why say Robbery?”

“Daily Prophet,” Hermione said. “Robbery sounds more interesting.”

“That happened ages ago,” Harry commented. “Back on my birthday, it says.”

“It says the Goblins claim nothing was stolen because the vault had been empties earlier that day,” Hermione nodded. “They have no idea who tried to get in, except the Goblins claim it was a wizard.”

“Says ‘dark’ wizard,” Harry corrected.

“You think the Goblins care one way or another?”

“No,” Harry agreed. “Probably more Prophet spin. Story obviously needs some given how long it’s been since it happened.”

“Goblins probably kept it quiet hoping to catch the would-be thief,” Hermione nodded. “They let the story out when they came up empty, hoping someone would say something to get the investigation back on track.”

“Sounds plausible,” Harry nodded. “Wait, who owned the vault?”

“Says there it was a Hogwarts vault,” Hermione said. “Oh my!”

“That’s what I thought too,” Clarice said. “Just like in Sensei’s timeline.”

“Which means...?”

“Voldemort is here,” Harry said.

“We don’t know that for certain,” Hermione began.

“I know. It’s circumstantial,” Harry nodded. “I’m not going to grab my sword and look for a turban wearing wizard to test my swordsmanship skills. But we cannot assume it’s not what we think it is either.”

“The spell isn’t ready yet, Harry.”

“And we don’t need it yet,” Harry replied.

After a moment Hermione continued. “I do feel sorry for him.”

“Who? Voldemort?” Harry asked.

“No, Quirrell,” Hermione said. “To stop Voldemort he must die. So I feel sorry for him.”

“The spirit cannot take active possession if resisted,” Harry said. “The person must accept something about it and allow it to happen. Voldemort had something he wanted. Knowledge? Ambition? A thirst for power? The ability to speak two words coherently? Who knows? But he had to allow what happened. He may have not understood just what it would mean or just who it was who seeking control was, but he did accept it. That’s why it’s not as simple as excising the parasite. That’s why you can no longer destroy one without destroying the other.”

“And that’s why we have to do what we have to do,” Clarice added.

“I know,” Hermione said. “It’s just sad.”

Harry thought there was no arguing against that. It was sad in a way. But the man who had once taught here was now long gone and the one who was here was a danger to all.

“Did you read all of this?” Clarice asked holding the letter from Sirius.

Harry nodded. "Why?"

Clarice handed the letter back which she had been reading and pointed to a fold at the bottom of the page.

P.S.: Have you and the others had a chance to meet Hagrid yet?

"I totally forgot about that," Harry said. Hermione nodded in agreement. "Tomorrow afternoon?"

"It'll have to be," Clarice said. "There's a notice on the board that First Year Gryffindors have flying lessons Friday afternoon after Charms."

## CHAPTER TEN: MEETING HAGRID

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Five First Years exited the huge “front” doors of Hogwarts Castle and into the sunlight. They followed a path that led to an iron gate in a long wall that seemed to separate the school grounds from the greater world beyond. But long before they reached the gate, they took a fork in the path to the right and away from the gate. They now began descending a steep hill towards a lake and large forest. A fork to the left would have taken them to the shores of the lake, the same lake they had crossed their first night. But they stayed to the right and soon saw a small hut just on the edge of the forest proper.

“Guess that’s Hagrid’s place,” Harry said.

A wisp of smoke rose skyward from the stone chimney. Harry and the other took that to mean that Hagrid was home as only a fool would live in an apparent tinder box like that hut and leave a fire in the hearth unattended. Then again, it would appear that this magical world was not short on fools. They soon arrived at the door to the hut.

The kids knew a fair amount about Hagrid. First and foremost, they knew he was half-giant which meant that he was very resistant to magic in general and legilimency in particular. He was also an honest and honorable man. They had heard that he was a true friend if you allowed him to be one and would no sooner betray a friend than stop being almost ten feet tall. He was a bit loose with things, particularly after a few drinks, but generally did not volunteer information. His major character flaw was he thought the world of Dumbledore. But according to McGonagall, he was not likely to tell Dumbledore anything unless asked directly and even then only with reluctance. Apparently, admiration was also mixed with a touch of fear or something. If McGonagall were to be believed, Hagrid could not be classified as a Dumbledore confidant.

His “loose lips” were a double edged sword. Hagrid probably knew more secrets about Hogwarts and what went on than anyone and if steered could be all but counted on to let a few slip. But that also

meant if they told him too much, that too could slip out. Still, they had been asked to at least make his acquaintance.

“Here goes nothing,” Harry said and he knocked upon the door.

“One moment,” a voice boomed and a loud and very deep bark was heard. “Oi Fang! Mind yer manners! We’ve got guests!”

The door to the hut opened and the giant of a man they remembered from Hogsmeade Station appeared in the door. What little of his face that could be seen through the huge, bushy beard was pleasant looking, although it was hard to tell as it took the man a moment to look down and see who had been knocking at his door.

“Why bless me,” he said with an obvious smile, “it’s ‘Arry Potter an’ ‘is friends, in’t it?”

Harry nodded.

“Now let’s see then. You’d be Neville Longbottom,” Hagrid said pointing to Neville.

“Yes Sir,” Neville said politely. “How’d you know?”

“’ Cause it’s common knowledge ‘mongst the staff you lot is thick as thieves an’ you bein’ the only other bloke,” Hagrid laughed. “Even I’m not that thick. An’ you don’ needs t’ be callin’ me Sir. Say tha’ an’ I’m like ter look over me shoulder thinkin’ on ‘er the professors done snuck in th’ back. Come on in yer lot. Been brewin’ up some tea, if’n yer in the mood.”

“Thanks,” Harry said and led the others into the Hut. It was much larger on the inside than it appeared from the door. There were a couple of large chairs and a couch around the front room and a door leading back to what looked to be a kitchen. A couple of tables were also by the chairs and couch and off to one side was a taller table with four chairs around it arguably for meals. One wall was dominated by a large fireplace and a kettle hung over the fire by an iron hook

that looked as if it could be swung out of the hearth, which it soon was. Hagrid placed the kettle on a stone near the hearth.

“We’ll jus’ let ‘er cool a bit while we gets acquainted,” Hagrid said. “You mus’ be Luna Lovegood,” he said to the only blonde girl in the room. After she nodded Hagrid said, “Knew tha’ ‘cause yer look like yer Mum did at yer age.”

Luna smiled. “Thank you.”

“That leave you two,” Hagrid said looking between Hermione and Clarice. “You’d be Hermione,” he said to Hermione, “and you’d be Clarice then.”

“How’d you know?” Clarice asked.

“Yer look like a Clarice,” Hagrid replied and then laughed. “Nah. Not true. I was a th’ sortin’ an’ remember ya from it. Whole lot er ya. An’ where be my manners? My Da’d cane me fer certain, if’n he were the type, which he wasn’t and if’n he could reach high enough, which he couldn’t since I was seven. I’m Rubeus Hagrid, but me friends calls me jus’ Hagrid. Now have a seat an’ I’ll pour’s some tea, eh?”

Soon, everyone had their tea.

“So,” Hagrid began, “yer likin’ yer classes I suppose? Then again, I did hear ‘bout Professor Snape. Now mind yeh, I ain’ one ter encourage such things, but e’s ‘bout as – er – mean as they come. No disrespect, but ‘e’s been on Gryffindors an’ Puffs since ‘e’s a student. ‘Asn’t mellowed wi’ age, he’s not. Whole school be talkin’ ‘bout yer lesson, ‘Arry.”

“Thanks,” Harry said. “If he’s like that, why does he teach?”

“Don’ rightly know,” Hagrid said. “Suppsed ter be a top Potioneer, but don’ know ‘bout teachin’. Certainly not ‘aving the ‘eart fer it. But Dumbledore trusts ‘im, ‘e does. Great man, Dumbledore. Kept me on ‘ere when ever’ one wanted ter be shot of me, ‘e did. Great man.

'Side from me job, 'e lets me do important stuff 'e'd trust no other with."

"Such as?" Harry asked.

"Can' be sayin', can I? Hogwarts stuff."

"So you must be a powerful wizard to be trusted like that," Harry said.

"I'm no wizard, 'Arry," Hagrid said sadly. "Might 'ave been. But it didn' 'appen."

"I don't understand," Harry said. "Can you or could you do magic?"

"Aye," Hagrid said. "Was a 'Hogwarts student like you lot once. Never finished."

"Grades?" Hermione asked.

"Weren' nothin' ter brag about, but weren' bad neither," Hagrid said. "I was – er – kicked out in me Third Year."

"Why?" several voices asked.

"Not important," Hagrid said. "Dumbledore knew what was true an' what wasn't. Convinced 'em t' keep me on as game keeper."

"But surely you could have still been taught," Hermione said.

"Snapped me wand, they did," Hagrid said. "Can't be no wizard with no wand, can you."

"You were a wizard before you had a wand," Harry said. "You had to be to come here in the first place. A wand does not make you a wizard, magic does."



“‘Cept when they say you can’t be one,” Hagrid sighed. “It was that er worse fer me. My Da was already dead an’ what’s I supposed ter do? ‘Tween you an’ me, I ‘ave been known ter dabble a bit, but strictly speakin’ I ain’t supposed ter be doin’ magic.”

“So,” Harry said, “Dumbledore kept you on to keep game and run errands.”

“’ Bout the size o’ it,” Hagrid said. “Not complainin’ mind. Would have done it even if I’d finished – assumin’ they asked.”

“Would you really?”

“Well, not if I could’a got work with dragons,” Hagrid admitted. “Beautiful beasties they is. Always wanted one meself or at least chance ter work with ‘em. But tha’ didn’ ‘appen so there’s no use pinin’ fer what can’t be.”

“So, you’ve been here a while?”

“Aye. Long enough tha’ there’s gran’kids and great-grans of them I went t’ school with here now.”

“So you knew my parents?” Harry asked. The conversation was now heading in the direction he wanted it to go.

“Aye. Yer father was quite the handful with ‘is friends. Told them time an’ again ter stay outta the forest. Never listened. Them Weasley boys reminds me o’ them. Now yer Mum, she was a true friend. Blessed she was. Top student an’ all that. I do miss her,” he finished by blowing his nose.

“I know it was you that brought me to the Dursleys that night,” Harry said. “Are you saying that was Hogwarts stuff?”

“Tha’ was – er – differen’. Dark time those were an’ we ‘ad ter pitch in ter fight ‘em.”

“And putting me with the Dursleys was fighting them?”

“Dumbledore said ‘twas th’ bes’ thin’ fer ya.”

“They nearly killed him!” Hermione said sharply. Even after all this time, the Dursleys were an issue for her. Harry no longer felt anything for them, but one sure way to get Hermione on a rant was to mention them. They were inexcusable. What really made it worse was the fact that by all accounts Lily Evans was a wonderful person and Lily and Petunia’s much older half brother Mike Evans was as well. With all the magic that was either in or came into the Evans line, Harry had been stuck with the one Evans who hated magic and anything associated with it.

“Now don’ ye go believin’ wha’s in them papers, Hermione...”

“I saw it with my own eyes! I was there with him every day in hospital for weeks and weeks! The doctors said it was a miracle he lived at all!”

“Er...”

“Those people starved him half to death, beat him to a pulp, broke his arm, ribs, set a vicious dog on him then left the country leaving him at home to die! They even reported him missing! If that’s what Dumbledore thinks is best, then the world would be better off shot of him!”

“Hermione,” Harry began. “That was a long time ago.”

“Not long enough!”

“I’m sure ‘e didn’t know,” Hagrid began.

“He didn’t bother to check! Not once in six years did he ever check on Harry!” Hermione yelled.

“Now yer see,” Hagrid began, “there were things...”

“What things?” Clarice asked hoping to stave off Hermione’s rant.

“’ E was in danger, ‘e was,” Hagrid said.

“So throwing him in with a bunch of murdering brutes made him safer?” Hermione asked. “‘Cause that’s what he did!”

Hagrid sighed. “McGonagall an’ I weren’t keen on the idea, mind you. But Dumbledore said... ‘E said they were the only family yer had left.”

“He was lying,” Harry said calmly, “that or he had no interest in the truth.”

“Lyin’?”

“I’m his family,” Clarice said. “I’m his younger sister. Harry and I were supposed to stay together.”

“So tha’s what Sirius was carryin’,” Hagrid said. “‘Twas you, weren’t it?”

“It was,” Clarice said. “According to Sirius, Dumbledore told him to get me out of there and adopted by a Muggle family. Sirius left me with Muggle child welfare not minutes later then went after Pettigrew. I was supposed to stay with Harry!”

“Let’s not forget that Aunt Petunia and our Mum had an older brother,” Harry said, “one who was and is married to a witch and who has eight magical children my age and older. Seems I had plenty of family. Dumbledore just felt I didn’t deserve them.”

“I’m sure ‘e meant...”

“Don’t even say meant well!” Hermione said. “The Muggles call what he did criminal negligence if not attempted manslaughter. Dumbledore knowingly and without care left a child in a situation

which could have lead to grievous bodily harm or death. If he were a Muggle, he'd still be in prison for it!"

"He said..." Hagrid began.

"I had the better deal at first," Clarice said hoping to diffuse a deteriorating situation. "I was adopted before that year was out by a very nice couple who were great parents to me. But Daddy got sick and died of cancer when I was five. When I was six, Mum was driving me to school when we were in an accident. I was hurt bad, but Mum died there in the car next to me before we could be pulled out. By some chance or miracle, I was sent to the same hospital where Harry was recovering from what our relatives had done to him and was in the room just next door. The people there figured out who we were. Who knows what my life would have been like had I not found Harry."

"And yer Aunt an' Uncle?" Hagrid asked.

"Dead," Harry said. "House caught fire when they were asleep. I was still in the hospital. They died. Clarice and I were placed with another family before we left the hospital. In that regard, it was a happy ending. But now here I am attending a school with a man who wants to see me dead..."

"I'm sure Dumbledore doesn' wan' tha'," Hagrid said, but the conviction that had been in his voice was long gone.

"He sure had a funny way of showing it," Harry said calmly. "Every other time he had anything to do with my life it went badly for me. It's a good thing he's stuck in London with the Minister stuff. At least I can sleep without fearing being smothered."

"He wouldn'!"

"And just how am I supposed to know that?" Harry asked. "The other times in my life when Dumbledore did what he thought was best for my family, I almost get killed and my family comes out worse than if they had never met the man! He puts us in hiding for some reason and my parents get murdered and goodness knows what happened

to me. He puts me with my Aunt, has my sister dumped off at an orphanage or some such like she's unwanted and the people I'm left with clearly didn't want me and tried to kill me. Let me tell you this: if I had any other option, I would never have come here!"

" 'E never said nothin'. Never did. Told me 'twas the Greater Good an' ever'thin' would be better. Never said nothin' 'bout breakin' up a family. Probably knew I couldn' be part o' that if I knew. I am sorry Harry an' Clarice."

"It's okay," Hermione said. "It's better now."

"Is it?" Hagrid asked. "Dumbledore's doin' dangerous stuff up at the castle ... I shouldn' 'ave said that."

"What stuff?"

"Nothin' you should be knowin'."

"Does it have anything to do with a large, three headed dog in the third floor corridor?" Harry asked.

"'ow do y' know about Fluffy?"

"Fluffy? It's got a name?" Hermione asked.

" ' Course 'e does. 'E's mine. Got 'im from a Greek chappie down at the pub. Dumbledore jus' borrowin' 'im is all."

"For what?" Harry asked.

"How do y' know?" Hagrid asked back. "Tha's secret tha' is."

"If it make you feel any better, we haven't seen it. We just heard about it."

"From who?"

“Can’t remember,” Harry lied. He heard about it from Sensei. “Look, you put a beast like that in a school full of kids and tell those same kids not to go somewhere where that beast is, do you really think they’ll listen? Course someone went looking and they talked and now a fair few know.”

“Dumbledore said...” Hagrid began then stopped. “Kids weren’ supposed t’ be able to get t’ Fluffy. Wouldn’t have agreed if they could. ‘Round here, he’s a right sort, gentle as a lamb. But ‘is kind is bred fer guardin’ stuff an’ when they ‘as sommat t’ guard, they can be as nasty as a dragon they can. Would kill yer soon as look at yer.”

“What’s it guarding?” Harry asked.

“None o’ yer business! Tha’s top secret that is. Tha’s between Dumbledore and Nicholas Flamel. I shouldn’ ‘ave said tha’.”

“The Philosophers Stone then,” Harry said. He knew he was goading Hagrid a little.

“How’d you know tha’?”

“Potions,” Harry said. “Anyone who knows a lot about potions knows about alchemy and the Stone and also knows Flamel made one long ago.” Harry left out the fact that he knew the stone was a fake and exactly why it was at Hogwarts.

“I suppose.”

“What’s it doing here?”

“Now tha’ not even Dumbledore’s sayin’. An’ if yer are worried ‘bout danger, than yer bes’ not be nosin’ where yer ain’t wanted.”

“Last thing I’d want to do,” Harry said before steering the conversation into a safer direction. That direction was about magical creatures which, fortunately, the group was equipped to handle. Luna had her Mastery in the subject after all. Yet she also had the uncanny

ability to appear innocent about things. She had always had that talent, one which led people to believe that she knew far less than she really did. It gave people the impression she was very interested when in fact she was sifting for information or, like now, simply making conversation.

While Luna kept Hagrid talking about all the beasties in the forest, as Hagrid put it, Harry looked at him carefully. Deep down he wondered whether he could trust this man. In another timeline, Sensei had and that trust had never been betrayed. In this timeline, Hagrid seemed trustworthy, but if there was one mark against the man it was his loyalty to Dumbledore. That loyalty had been severely tested today. But to what degree? People had a strange ability to justify things in their own minds that could not be justified and make excuses for the inexcusable. Harry noted that whenever Hagrid looked at him, there was pain or something like it in his eyes. Was it guilt?

“Are you okay Hagrid?” Harry asked when there was a pause in the conversation.

“Fine,” Hagrid said abruptly. It was obvious he was not fine.

“You’re feeling guilty, aren’t you?” Harry asked.

Hagrid shrugged.

“You feel as if you are somehow responsible for what happened to me with the Dursleys, don’t you?”

Hagrid nodded.

“It’s not your fault, Hagrid,” Harry began.

“If I hadn’ brung y’ there, y’ might a had a better...” Hagrid began.

“You had no idea who or what they were,” Harry began.

“ Muggles they were,” Hagrid said. “Worst sort, ‘ccording to Professor McGonagall. Should a known.”

“Not all Muggle are like that, Hagrid. Most are not, in fact. My Cousin Mike is not like that at all and he was my Aunt Petunia’s brother. The Grangers are not like that either. It’s not your fault, Hagrid.”

“Should a tried sommat. Should a told Dumbledore it were no good fer ya. Stead, I jus’ left y’ on that doorstep and went away. An’ it were me tha’ took y’ away from your sister.”

“And why did you do that?” Harry asked.

“’ Cause Dumbledore said it was best for the both of yeh,” Hagrid replied. “An’ I believed him!”

“Did you have any reason not to?”

“Donno. You were jus’ babies an...”

“I don’t blame you, Hagrid,” Harry said.

“Neither do I,” Clarice added.

“If it helps, I forgive you for whatever you felt you did that was wrong,” Harry added.

“I do too,” Clarice said.

“Thank you both,” Hagrid said blowing his nose into a piece of cloth roughly the size of a small table cloth. “So y’ don’ blame me?”

“No Hagrid,” Harry said honestly. “Not that there’s no one to blame. But you are not to blame.”

“Who then?”

“The Dursleys of course,” Harry said. “They were not forced to treat me like they did. They chose to act that way. Sirius to a limited extent.



We know he knew what my parents wanted if something happened as it did, yet he followed Dumbledore's orders and took Clarice into the Muggle world before running off in search of the real traitor. Things might well have been different had he not been sent to Azkaban. He might well have sorted things out once things had calmed down a bit. But he was not around to do so.

"The real person I blame is Dumbledore. He's the one who separated Clarice and I and sent me off to the Dursleys. He also knew what my parents wanted and convinced others, most notably Sirius, to ignore their wishes. He should have known what sort of hell he was sending me to, yet he did nothing. He never bothered to check on me and he ignored what he heard from the one person in the neighborhood he sent there to keep tabs on me. To this day, I have no idea what he was thinking. I do not know the man. Never met him. To be honest, I'm not sure I ever want to."

"He's a great man," Hagrid said, but the conviction seemed to have disappeared.

"Perhaps in some areas he is," Harry conceded. "When it comes to me, however, he has repeatedly proven himself to be untrustworthy. Right now, he could tell me grass is greed and I would not believe him absent independent research. In the best of all worlds, he would remain in London for the next seven years."

"He must'a 'ad a reason..." Hagrid began.

"Can you think of any good reason to allow a child to suffer as Harry did?" Hermione asked. "I can't."

Hagrid nodded.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11th, 1991 – LITTLE WHINGING, SURRY, U.K.

Within a copse of trees and seemingly impenetrable underbrush, there was a flash of light and a loud crack. Neither the light nor the sound was noted by anyone and where once had been empty space

there now stood a woman in her mid twenties. She had shoulder length brown hair, blue eyes and was dressed in jeans, a button down blouse, a light jumper and a jacket. It was a style she hoped would be nondescript and would blend in.

She then checked herself out as if to see if she was all there and if anything had gone missing. In the right pocket of her jacket there was a wad of bills exactly where she left them. The amount was about six thousand Pounds, all in twenty Pound notes, all printed before 1990. In her left pocket was an additional 10,000 galleons in gold, which was thought to be more than enough for what she had to do. There was a stick of wood hidden in her sleeve. It was a wand for she was a witch, although the wand was not registered which meant as long as she did not cast any of the spells known as Unforgivables, any magic she used should remain undetected by the paranoid magical government. She pulled out a hand drawn map and scanned it. She seemed to be where she was supposed to be, which meant she was about a mile or so from her objective. It seemed like a nice day for a walk and a part of her was pleased as she could barely remember the last time she had been out in the fresh air.

She found herself walking down what had to be the High Street of the small town that was a part of Greater London. As she passed a Library, she noted a box containing newspapers and chose to have a look. She really doubted the paper would have anything of interest to her or relevant to her mission, but it was worth a peek for another reason. She scanned the date and saw that the paper was dated 11 September 1991. She was almost four years off target, but fortunately it was an overshoot.

She soon saw a sign that said "Privet Drive" and began to walk down the street. She was looking for a particular address and found she was in the forties and as she walked the numbers went down so she was walking in the right direction, or so she had been told. She did her best not to marvel at the things she had only ever read about or seen in books. Her goal was to reach her destination, take a look, and then head north. If the date was right, her target would not be at home so she would have to head north to acquire it. The house numbers were soon in single digits and she knew she was close. She passed Number Six and beyond it was an empty lot. She continued to

the next house which had to be her first destination. The next was Number Two and she stopped dead in her tracks, turned and slowly returned to the empty lot.

“This can’t be,” she whispered to herself. “It’s supposed to be here!”

She drew her wand surreptitiously and did a quick scan for any magical signatures. There were not any, which meant if there had been any magic here above background; it had been months if not years earlier. This told her two things. First, her target had not been here in a long time and second, despite all evidence to the contrary, her partner might not have been here either. There was no sign of his magical drop box which he was to leave here in the event that she arrived. She slowly walked around the lot wondering what had happened. All she knew for certain was that this was not right.

“Looking for something, Miss?” a voice called out. She saw an elderly lady on the sidewalk looking at her.

“Er ... yes, I suppose,” she said. “I’ve been overseas for a while. I used to have a cousin who lived at Number Four Privet Drive, Little Whinging Surry, or so I was told. Yet there doesn’t seem to be a Number Four.”

“A cousin? You wouldn’t be a Dursley, would you,” the woman asked with more than a hint of hostility in her voice.

“No,” she replied. “My name is Luna Jones. My cousin was their nephew I think. I was related to the lad on his father’s side.”

“Oh,” the woman relaxed and then looked sad. “The place burned down about three years ago,” she said. “Dursleys died in the fire.”

“And my cousin?” Luna asked in shock.

The woman shrugged. “Poor boy. Hard to believe anyone would do that to a child. Beat him something horrible we heard. It was in all the papers what they did to him. The Dursleys were up on charges when

it happened. They nearly killed the poor boy. He was in hospital in London when the fire happened. Child Welfare had him."

"Any idea what became of him?" Luna asked.

"Foster care most like, assuming he was not adopted," the woman said. "He's not around anymore, that's for certain, not that I blame him. If I had to live through that I would be shot of this place as well. How long have you been gone?"

"Six years," Luna said. "Mission work in Canada."

The old woman nodded. "Sorry I can't be more help, dear."

"Thank you," Luna said as she watched the woman walk off down the street.

'What have you done, Neville Love?' she thought to herself. Once she was alone again, Luna took a small, wooden box from her pocket and tossed it into the lot. It was her drop box. It was magical and yet only her Neville would be able to find or use it. It would tell Neville where she was. She only hoped nothing had happened to him.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11th, 1991 – THE LEAKY CAULDRON, LONDON, U.K.

Luna "Jones" was seated at a table in the tavern by herself reading that day's copy of the Daily Prophet as she nursed a cup of coffee, a luxury she had never tried before. All of this was new to her. She had never been to London before so far as she could recall and had only seen it in old pictures. Yesterday for her, London no longer existed.

Luna had no real last name. Last names were unnecessary where she was from, or more accurately when she was from. She did not even know if Luna was her real name or if she ever had one. She did not even know for certain when she was born. She believed it was between 2048 and 2050 but otherwise did not even know when her real birthday was. In her original life as a servant, such trivial facts were of no interest to anyone who mattered, which was anyone other

than her. Her “father” had deduced her probable based upon the state of her permanent teeth and her size when he had found her and her friend “Neville.” It was in 2055. June 30th, to be exact, which was the first date she knew for certain. It was the date that dates and last names ceased to matter for it was on that day that London and much of the world ceased to exist. She was between five and seven years old at the time, and that was a guess. Her father named her Luna after a long dead old friend of his.

Yesterday, for Luna, had been December 17th, 2077. She had travelled back in time to change the past so that the future she knew would never come to pass. She pondered that. Her job was nothing less than to stop the end of the world, yet it was the end of the world that led her and Neville to Father and from him to where she was sitting now. If she stopped the end, she would never meet Father. She might never even have met her Love Neville. If they never met, she could never go back in time. Father had tried to explain that their time led to this time she was now in such that even if she was never born in this time, she would still exist because she did exist. It was enough to give her a headache.

Her target date was July 1995. She knew, however, that she would likely miss that date. Location was more important so that temporal accuracy was sacrificed. The hope was if she arrived at the wrong time it would be earlier than the target date. She was to go to Little Whinging, Surry, to Number Four Privet Drive and find a boy named Harry Potter who lived there. She was to guide him on a course that would lead him away from a man named Albus Dumbledore and onto a path that might prevent the end of the world. She was the backup plan.

Her Love Neville had travelled back first on June 10th, 2077. He had the same mission and they all figured that if he were successful, she and father would cease to exist. That had not happened, so father sent her back to see the mission through. But something was already very different and wrong. That Number Four had burned to the ground was not a surprise as it had in her timeline. But it had burned down in the late summer of 1997, six years from now; not two or three years ago. The Dursleys were dead decades before they would pass away from natural causes in her time. All three were dead

before she was even born, but they had not died in a fire and certainly not in this century. Harry Potter was probably alive, but his whereabouts and living arrangements were now a mystery.

The plan assumed he was with the Dursleys and would be isolated both by them and by the greater Wizarding World in 1995. This would make it somewhat easy for her to gain access to him. While he was isolated, he was not locked in and was free to roam the neighborhood, which meant he could be accessed, befriended at a pivotal time in his life, and maybe steered away from Dumbledore's schemes towards a path or paths that would prevent the end of everything. But the plan assumed that 1995 would happen as it had before and that now was thrown into question. Someone had changed everything.

Before her in the paper and in the conversations she heard in the tavern was additional proof that everything was different. In the magically shrunken notebook in her back pocket was page after page of information about Harry and the times in which he lived. Father had included everything he could remember or had read about those times, including the times before they were scheduled to meet. It seemed the changes were limited to the magical world for now. The London Times had articles discussing recent world events, opining that following the attempted coups in the Soviet Union the past August 18th, the "Evil Empire" was clearly in its death throes. It was already all but clear that the Soviet Union would not survive 1991. There were also stories about the aftermath of the first Gulf War, particularly about the plight of the Kurds and Shiites in Iraq. And there were stories about the former Yugoslavia and the outbreak of war between break away Croatia and what was left of the dying communist country. All were consistent with the last timeline.

But while the Muggle world was undergoing massive political change, this was supposed to be a dull time in the Magical one. Nothing much happened following the aftermath of the First Voldemort War which ended effectively on October 31st, 1981 when little Harry Potter had his fateful encounter with Voldemort. In her timeline, Cornelius Fudge became Minister for Magic in Britain in May of 1990 when his predecessor Millicent Bagnold retired stating the world had become too boring. His election was one of the swiftest peacetime appointments in ages, a two week process most of which had been

spend deciding the daily menus for the Wizengamot who were per tradition sequestered until a new Minister was installed.

But that's not this world, Luna noted. Bagnold had only just retired and things in the years leading up to her retirement seemed to be anything but boring. She still did not have many facts to work with, but the talk in the room and implications in the paper were that the Ministry and Wizengamot had been plagued by scandal for a few years now and were effectively paralyzed. The Wizengamot was under sequestration and the thought was that they would be lucky to have a new Minister by year's end, as the Wizengamot was so divided that they could not reach an agreement on what color the sky was, much less anything as important as a new Minister. All the previous favorites for the office had been sacked by Bagnold following her anti-corruption campaign a couple of years earlier, including Cornelius Fudge. Something major had happened.

'How major?' she asked herself. There was no telling, of course. 'Could it be significant enough to affect my future life?' she thought. Again, there was no way to be certain. She was a witch, that much was certain. But she had no idea who or what her parents had been and there was no way to find out. She did not know who they were and even if she did, it was certain they had not yet been born and entirely probable that her grandparents were not born yet. If they had been Muggles, the changes she could already see were not yet of import. If they were magicals, however, she had no idea. 'What have you done, Neville Love?' she again thought.

Then again, could it have been Neville? True, he had been sent back some six months before she had been, but that really meant nothing. The temporal inaccuracy that had landed her here four years earlier could have placed Neville just about anywhere, or any time. He might not even be here yet. But if he wasn't here, who or what had changed things? That was a scary thought. There were others who would love to have seen the times changed. Those people would not seek a better future, just one where the world did not destroy everything.

She would need to find out everything she could about this new time. Then she would need to find out everything she could about the Harry Potter who lived in this time. She did not mind, so much. It would

mean days and weeks in libraries looking over old newspapers and following up with other investigations. But she liked that sort of thing. Father always said she reminded him of the friend he lost the day he found her and Neville. Although her name was Luna, she reminded father of another woman who loved research named Hermione.

Two floors about where Luna sat, an old man was in a room reading a book. Most who knew him would either consider his choice of reading material typical or insulting. Those who would think typical generally thought the old man was a little mad. Those who felt his choice of reading was insulting were almost without exception Purebloods who believed the Muggle world had nothing to offer. Albus Dumbledore was not mad and while he was a Pureblood, he did not condemn the Muggle world in such broad strokes. True, he believed the two worlds needed to be separate. But he also believed the animosity certain magical held for the non-magical world was unhealthy. The secrecy could not be maintained if there were any in his world who held Muggles beneath contempt. But that was a crusade for another day and for now Albus found the works of American born Tom Clancy a good escape from the political hell he found himself in. He read Douglas Addams in the Wizengamot as it provided a better distraction from the juvenile atmosphere. Frankly, Hogwarts students seemed more mature.

The Pureblood elites would be horrified to learn how little there was in their world that was truly unique to it, Albus mused. Sequestration was one such unoriginal idea. It was borrowed from the Catholic Church. When the Church needed a new Pope, the electors, all of whom were Cardinals or Princes of the Church as they were once known, were almost literally locked away until they elected their new leader. The selection of Minister for Magic was similar.

All members of the Wizengamot were to remain in London either in the Ministry of Magic or their rooms in the various magical boarding establishments most of the time. They were allowed three hours a day for meals or to enter Diagon Alley to purchase necessities. They were allowed three hours a week to attend to their personal affairs. Otherwise, they were forbidden to leave or even call or write to their families and friends until they had a new Minister. The idea was while they were here their personal affairs and businesses were



unattended and would suffer from their absence thus motivating them to act quickly. Usually it had worked.

However, these were not usual times. The Wizengamot was too divided to reach a consensus about the lunch arrangements, much less any weightier issues. Years ago, Albus could use his influence to move things along. But the recent scandals had sapped his ability to persuade and sufficiently damaged his influence that he was now just one voice in the multitude on the floor of the Wizengamot. As Chief Warlock, he still had the role of trying to maintain order and keep the body on task. But he knew the reality. It would be months before any headway would be made and months more before a Minister would take office.

Damn that Bagnold, he thought. Why did she pick this time to retire? Had she done so a year earlier or even a year later it would have not mattered. But this time was not good so far as Albus was concerned. He was supposed to be at Hogwarts beginning to guide the young Harry Potter towards his inevitable destiny. He had arranged things such that Tom Riddle would make an attempt to return this year and the man was now at Hogwarts. His plan was to trap the villain and arrange an encounter between him and the boy. It was a risk, but he was certain Riddle was too weak to do much more than scare the lad senseless and hadn't he arranged it so Riddle took possession of one of the weakest wizards he could steer into harm's way? If he had selected Severus for that task, the boy would already be dead. But Quirrell? He was too weak even under possession to cast an Unforgivable.

The plan was simple enough. Harry would encounter the most dangerous Dark Wizard of these times, perhaps of all time, and naturally would turn to Dumbledore for guidance and support. That had been the plan since he left the boy at his relatives all those years ago, although at that time he had not worked out any of the details. Harry was left there on purpose. Albus knew there would be no true affection for the lad. He had not, however, supposed that the relatives could have ever done to the little boy what they had done to little Harry. Had he even envisioned the possibility, he would have done something different. Abuse such as that was not for the Greater Good and might well have pushed the lad towards the Dark. Still, it was

imperative the lad not be raised in the magical world. He would have been treated as a prince and that would have made it all but impossible to mold the lad into what he needed to become. A strong sense of self worth would have been counterproductive.

Then, the damnable Dursleys tried to kill him. Muggle government was clearly faster to respond than Magical. The lad wound up in hospital and under the jurisdiction of Muggle Child Welfare. He was obviously placed with another family and an emotional attachment obviously formed. How it triggered the Blood Wards was a question as the likelihood of Harry being reunited with his sister was less than minimal. But Albus would concede he did not know all there was to know about Blood Wards and it might have worked simply by placing the lad in a loving environment. The result was the boy passed from his knowledge or control for three long years. Worse was that with those Wards in place the boy could not be controlled during the holidays. Albus knew he would be hard pressed to suggest other arrangements. Subtlety was a key to his plan and ordering the lad to spend his Holidays at Hogwarts or somewhere that lacked those Wards was anything but subtle. Albus was left with the school year to work the lad.

Then this current wrinkle arose. He was sequestered and could not leave London for more than three hours a week. As Headmaster, he had obtained an exception to policy that would allow him to leave under certain "dire" circumstances. The problem was he could not easily manufacture such circumstances. He truly doubted anyone would do him the favor of dying at the school. Likewise it would be bad form to compel someone to commit a capital offense at the school. He seriously doubted the school would be burned down, attacked by dark forces (Voldemort notwithstanding, but he could not reveal that), erupt into revolution or riot or be destroyed by Vogons or anyone else. Thus, the dire circumstances that would allow him to get back to school and to Potter were not realistic.

Potter was not what he had expected and in some ways he was needed at the school to guide the boy. He had hoped for a pliable youth. Being raised among the Muggles should have done that. Magical children had historically had difficulties as youths in that world. Albus did not know why, but most Muggle raised children had

few if any friends in the other world. They all seemed to enter Hogwarts desperate to fit in and find themselves. You could see it on their faces when they first were sorted. It was not the look on young Harry's face, however. While he did not look the part of the young prince, the lad looked confident and sure of himself. Not even his father James had looked that way when he was sorted and James was every bit of the young prince at that age. A confident young man did not need a mentor, and the Greater Good demanded that Potter have Albus as mentor.

But being at the school now was not an option. True, he could resign as Chief Warlock. But that would be a disaster. He knew it would throw the magical world into even more political chaos and would, in all likelihood, allow the ultra conservatives to seize power, which would be as bad as Voldemort gaining power. While Albus believed leadership must vest in those raised in their cultural traditions, and by definition that meant Purebloods, to do so at the expense of the majority of society would be racial suicide. If the conservatives did not manage to breed magic into extinction, their animosity towards the rest of the world would bring war upon them. Merlin forbid if the Muggles got involved in that. Magic gave his people significant advantages over Muggles. But this meant that one well trained and powerful wizard could probably fight against a hundred Muggles. The problem was there were more highly trained Muggle warriors in the British Isles than magicals of any ability. Fighting Muggles was suicide. The best thing for his world was no contact with Muggles at all. In his opinion, using magic on any Muggle aside from when necessary to hide magic should be treated the same way as using an Unforgivable – it should condemn the witch or wizard to life in prison. To prevent such a future, he had to remain where he was.

Still, he had those three hours a week where he could return to Hogwarts. But to take "special interest" in young Potter was also problematic. He had seldom ever taken "special interest" in any student and even then it was much later – usually after they had taken their O.W.L.s. He had never taken interest in a First Year and to do so would raise questions which he had no desire to answer. True, once Potter had faced off against Voldemort again such interest could be justified, but not before then. He would have to wait. Albus

was well aware that plans “never” survive first contact. But knowing that maxim did not make things any easier.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Harry was sitting on his bed reading a book. The curtains were drawn as it was late and a two-way silencing charm was in place. This prevented him from hearing the snores of his roommates as they slept. He knew Neville snored, but Neville proved to be tame as compared to Ron Weasley. Ron seemed decent enough, but there was no way Harry would willingly room with the kid absent liberal use of the silencing charm. It was two way because while infrequent, he still had nightmares about his time with the Dursleys and his reactions woke people. In Japan and at home he did not bother with the precaution as he usually found himself in the arms of Hermione and that was always worth the pain of remembering, although it also explained why she was even more likely to go off about his past than he was as she had with Hagrid earlier. But here? The last thing he wanted was “comfort” from a bloke.

Harry sensed he was not alone and looked up from his book to see Sensei sitting on the end of the bed.

“A most interesting beginning,” Sensei said.

Harry nodded. “Not exactly what I expected,” he admitted. “Why haven’t I seen you before now?”

“Well, this is not exactly Japan, is it?” Sensei replied.

Harry nodded. During his four summers in Japan he shared a flat with Hermione and Clarice. It was easy for them to spend some time with Sensei as they did not have to worry about anyone noting they were having a conversation with someone who was not there. Privacy here was a little harder to arrange.

“Your probable solution to the Quirrell matter is quite interesting,” Sensei said.

Harry nodded. "Having a Spell Crafter does have its advantages."

"And why that spell?"

"If it works, there can be no blame," Harry replied. "To everyone else it should appear mostly harmless. The only person it could harm ..."

"Or kill," Sensei added.

Harry nodded, "or kill is someone possessed by Voldemort."

"An unfortunate accident," Sensei said.

Harry nodded. "It'll be a couple of months before it is ready."

"The Quidditch match, I presume?"

"You did say he tried to kill you then."

Sensei nodded. "We thought it was Severus at the time..."

"Severus?"

"Professor Snape," Sensei said. "My Hermione saw him doing something that looked like trying to perform a jinx. Actually, it was Quirrell and Snape was trying to counter it. Hermione set Snape on fire which distracted everyone, including Quirrell."

"Snape tried to save you?"

"He's an odd one, Harry. He doesn't like you, but he will try and protect you to a point. Both timelines are probably consistent on that point. You look too much like your father for his comfort and his hatred for your father never died."

"Why'd he hate my father?"

“It’s complicated,” Sensei sighed. “You’ve met Draco Malfoy. Think of Malfoy with a brain and competence and that was your father at his age and Sirius for that matter.”

“Arrogant?”

Sensei nodded. “He would grow out of it, but he was the cock of the walk when he was younger which naturally grated people. Add to that he disliked Severus from the day they met and went out of his way to torment the boy... Now don’t get me wrong, Severus gave as good as he got and could be viciously vindictive. But hexing people because you don’t like them is not a way to make friends.”

“That seems obvious,” Harry said.

“Apparently, it did not become obvious to your father for some years. His maturation was largely due to your mother, which was yet another reason why Snape hated him.”

“My mother?”

“Your mother was Snape’s first and arguably only friend. They met when they were about eight or nine years old and were practically inseparable. He told her about magic. One might say had things been different, she was to Severus as Hermione is to you and vice versa. But that’s not what happened. Some of that was your father’s fault as his constant bullying – for lack of a better word – probably motivated Snape to fall in with certain Slytherins who would later be Death Eaters. That was his undoing in many ways for he eventually began to take on their attitudes about many things. He came to hate Muggle Borns, your mother being sole exception. She did not see it that way and ended her friendship with Severus when it was clear he had fallen in with the Pureblood bigots. Add to it the fact that she would eventually marry his arch enemy, and Severus hated your father all the more.”

“So he’s nasty because of my father?”

“It’s not quite that simple. In you he sees your father because you look almost exactly like him. But he also sees his weakness and greatest failure, one that destroyed him.

“You see, Snape became a Death Eater...”

“And he’s allowed here!” Harry yelled.

Sensei nodded. “He became a Death Eater. That means he has killed as a murder is part of the initiation rite. But unlike many of his – er – colleagues, the man has something akin to a conscience. It was Snape that overheard part of the Prophecy that has so affected your life. He reported what he heard to Voldemort who immediately began plotting to eliminate any family that fit the description. Now as you recall, Voldemort would have come after your family anyway. He would not suffer another Founders’ Heir to challenge his right to rule, or whatever else he thought he was entitled to. Snape’s revelation merely forced him to act sooner than he might have otherwise and set his sights on the Longbottoms.

“Snape could care less about James and arguably you. But Voldemort did not leave survivors and that meant your mother would die as well. That was one thing Snape could not stomach. He tried to convince Voldemort to spare your mother, and you for that matter, but in any event your mother. When it was clear that Voldemort could not be persuaded, Snape went to Dumbledore hoping the man would do something to keep your mother safe, even if that included sparing you and your father. Dumbledore was more interested in which of you was the child of the prophecy and a few deaths were a small price to pay, thus he did nothing. The rest, they say, is history.”

“Then why is Snape here?” Harry asked incredulously.

“Snape became a very effective spy against Voldemort. He agreed to do that in exchange for Dumbledore protecting your family. He should have asked for a wizard’s oath to such effect, but was probably too emotionally distraught to think of it. His role became public knowledge after the war and that marked him. While the Death Eaters had gone to ground, there was a real chance one of them

might try to kill Snape for betraying their cause. Hence, he was brought here to teach and to keep him safe from retribution.”

Harry nodded. “Sun Tzu did say that the good general protects his spies. But that does not excuse him as a teacher.”

“I agree,” Sensei said. “Arguably, you exposed him with that Potions detention. Quite extraordinary.”

“I’m surprised that nothing has come from that,” Harry said. “That should have exposed me. I mean the Club knows the truth, but he surely should suspect something and I was amazed he did not mention it to Dumbledore.”

“You hit him at his two weakest points,” Sensei said. “First of all, his hatred of Sirius is such he is more than willing to believe Sirius tutored you in Potions just to make Snape look bad. You also hit him in his ego – and he does have one. I don’t think the man is willing to admit he was out done by an eleven-year-old under any circumstances. He probably would have said something if anyone else had brought it up.”

“Hopefully, he won’t be as nasty a cuss,” Harry mused.

“Don’t count on it,” Sensei said. “But it did seem to get the fence sitters off.”

“Excuse me?”

“The Club,” Sensei said with a smile. “You seem to have doubled it with one lesson.”

“Here,” Harry agreed. “It’s too early to say whether something similar will happen at the other schools.”

Sensei nodded. “And you’ve finally met Hagrid,” he said changing topics. “What did you think?”



“Seems nice enough,” Harry said. “His trust in Dumbledore is disturbing, however.”

“It’s not what it was in my time,” Sensei said. “Hermione’s rant would have earned her a stern rebuke from him in that time.”

“She gets that way about my life before we met,” Harry sighed.

“She should,” Sensei said. “But Hagrid would not have been so quiet regarding what was a blatant attack on Dumbledore. You were probably right that he feels somewhat responsible for what happened to you with the Dursleys. He’s that kind of man. It would seem that even before you came here he was harboring some questions about Dumbledore.

“Don’t get me wrong. He probably still respects the man and trusts him to a point. But he clearly read about what happened to you when the scandal broke a few years ago. He now connects you and what he did with The-Boy-Who-Was-Abused and Dumbledore’s admitted complicity in that horrible situation. He’s struggling with the Albus Dumbledore who gave him a chance when no one else was willing to do so and the Albus Dumbledore who condemned an innocent child to a hell for no apparent reason.

“In my time, Hagrid was Dumbledore’s man through and through. I don’t think that is the case now, although he is still loyal to some point.”

“Is that the reason you did not appear earlier?” Harry asked.

“The thought did cross my mind, such as I have one,” Sensei said. “He is the last who might be able to see me as he was my first real friend in this world and was a very true one his entire life. But yes, right now his connection with Dumbledore is a concern for me. Well that and the fact he is lousy when it comes to secrets. But here’s a point to consider: even in my time, were Hagrid forced to choose between Dumbledore and Hogwarts, Dumbledore would have lost. Something to think about going forward.”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: LEARNING TO FLY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Harry thought about the day before as he showered. The Potions lesson had been a bit of a surprise as he expected Snape to be on the offensive. Snape, apparently, had different plans and had ignored Harry the whole lesson, if you could call it a lesson. Snape had them make two potions, directions were on the board and that was it. There was no lecture, no explanation and no assistance whatsoever. The only time Snape left his desk was when time expired and that was to check on the potions. The Club members' potions (not surprisingly) passed, although it was clear Snape was hoping for failures. Sally-Anne and Blaise Zabini also passed. Then again, they partnered with Club members even if Zabini still did not know just what that meant.

The remaining Slytherins did not do as well as a group. Parkinson passed both her potions, but she apparently had bothered to read the assignment before class. Malfoy and his goons seemed to be of the opinion that reading was for lesser morals and paid the price with failing marks. There were no points deducted or detentions awarded, but it was clear who the new "victims" of Snape's wrath were and it was not Harry. He could not help but smile as Snape "suggested" that Malfoy might not be related to his parents by blood. Malfoy, in turn, blamed his partner which earned a further rebuke from Snape that was a snide insult to others as Snape suggested that if a Muggle Born could make a passable potion, a Pureblood such as Malfoy had no excuse.

Having heard "horror" stories about Snape for years, Harry had to admit it was a "nice" lesson. He was not holding his breath however. He knew sooner or later the real Snape would return and Harry would be the target. Still it was a "relaxing" day. Ron Weasley was in heaven. It was obvious by now he hated Malfoy with a passion and anytime Malfoy went down, Ron was happy. Harry wondered why and had asked later that day. It seems that aside from being an arrogant idiot whose scariest threat was telling his father, Malfoy had said some mean things to and about Millie Bulstrode.

With thoughts of Malfoy becoming a social pariah dancing in his head, Harry walked down to the Common Room to meet the others for breakfast and arrived just in time for a scene.

“What the blue blazes is this Wood?” a high pitched voice bellowed. Harry saw a young boy glaring at Oliver Wood next to the notice board. Harry did not know the boy’s name. He was still learning the names of his fellow House members, at least those who had not been in the Club. The boy had to be a Second Year, or a pint sized Third Year. Aside from that, Harry had no idea who he was or why he was yelling at Wood, although the later was about to be revealed.

“You lost a Chaser and Seeker from last year’s team and you’re only holding tryouts for Chaser?”

Wood nodded and said something.

“Who’d you move to Seeker? Why aren’t there two positions open?” There was another pause as it seemed Wood was saying something. “What a load of rubbish! How could you have seen anyone else play? You haven’t seen me! I demand you let me try for Seeker!” The answer clearly did not satisfy the boy and he stormed out of the Common Room.

Harry walked up to Oliver. “What was that all about?” he asked the Fifth Year Quidditch Captain / Club Member.

“Cormac McLaggen,” Wood said. “Second Year little snot. Thinks ‘cause he can sit a broom he deserves to be on the team.”

“That kid thinks the world was created for him,” another voice said. Harry turned and saw it was one of the Twins. “Was a berk even as a First Year.”

“Which is rather impressive,” the first replied.

“But not in a good way.”

“Not Club material.”

“Not that anyone would have him.”

“Even the Second Years don’t like him much.”

“Please don’t tell us you’re letting him try out Wood,” the second Twin said.

“No choice,” Wood shrugged. “He’s not banned and can stay on a broom. However, if that little snot thinks he has any hope of making the team ... I wouldn’t care if he’s the next Misha Prokolov, he won’t play while I’m Captain.” Wood smiled and then left for Breakfast.

“Misha Prokolov?” Harry asked.

“Played for Kiev a while back,” Ron Weasley said, apparently having joined the group. “Came up as a Chaser, but played every position on the team at one point in his career. And he was world class at every position. Said to be the best all around player ever.”

“Is there anything about Quidditch you don’t know little bro?” one of the twins asked.

“I’m sure there is,” Ron shrugged. “But it probably isn’t that important.”

“Little brat’s memorized Quidditch Through The Ages,” the other twin said to Harry.

“How do you think I finally learned to read?” Ron said with a smile.

“So who has Wood pinned for Seeker?” one of the Twins asked.

“Who do you think?” Ron replied looking at Harry. “Best seeker in Juniors two years running.”

“He mentioned something like that,” Harry admitted. “Still, there’s the little fact about First Years not playing for their House Teams.”

“After the pasting we took last year against Slytherin,” one of the twins said, “McGonagall would do anything. It’s up to her, really.”

“There’s something else,” Harry said softly.

All three Weasley’s raised their eyebrows.

“There’s a chance W.I.S.E. League Seniors are going public.”

“What do you mean?” Ron asked.

“I mean Seniors will play on the school pitches, not at Camp.”

“Wicked!” the Twins said in unison.

“So you’re trying for that if it happens?” Ron asked.

“Trying regardless,” Harry said. “Seniors need a decent Seeker, no offense to Tamara. But if we play publically, I’d probably pass on House Quidditch, assuming I made the school team of course.”

“Like that’s not going to happen oh Commissioner,” one of the twins said.

“I’m not using that to…” Harry began to protest.

“Relax, Harry,” the other said. “We all know you’re the best we got. But you’d really pass on the House team then?”

“Wouldn’t you?” Ron said. “I mean assuming you had to choose one? W.I.S.E League plays against the best in the country! I’d play third reserve for them in a heartbeat even if it meant no House play.”

“Why would you have to choose?” the other twin asked.

“If it happens,” Harry said, “McGonagall will set the try-out rules. True, W.I.S.E. League will be restricted to the Club, but over half of

the House players are already in it. She would probably say that you have to choose. Makes sense. Given how many play on W.I.S.E. League teams, more people would be playing and it would allow non-Club members some opportunity. Otherwise, we'd probably take over."

"And if she doesn't make you choose between one or the other?" the first twin asked.

Harry shrugged. "Might do both. I mean, it's not as if any of us need to study." He also knew it was at an intra-house match where Quirrell made the attempt in the other timeline. "It's up to McGonagall, really."

"Or she might leave it up to the Heads of House," the other twin noted. "Let's hope Gryffindors can do both. Otherwise that annoying pompous git McLaggen would probably get to play."

"Too true, George."

"But it would mean more Quidditch," Ron said with excitement.

"Nothing more important than Quidditch, is there?" Fred asked.

"Sure there is," Ron said. "And food tops the list! See you guys!" Ron replied before practically running from the Common Room.

"We'd better get down to Breakfast quick," George began.

"Lest our little bro eat everything in sight," Fred finished.

"One of these days I'll be able to tell you two apart without name tags," Harry chuckled.

"When that day happens," Fred said.

"You'll join Ginny as the only one," George added.

"Even our parents have trouble."

“Although it should be easy enough,” George said with a grin at Fred.

“Everyone knows I’m the good looking one,” the two brothers said in unison.

The afternoon following Charms found Harry and the rest of the Gryffindors heading out to the Quidditch Pitch. This was to be their first scheduled “flying lesson,” although they all knew it was more an evaluation as to who needed basic lessons and who did not. Harry, Ron and Clarice knew they probably did not. After all, they both had played in Juniors. Hermione and Neville were also fair flyers, although neither of them had any real interest in Quidditch, at least as players. Lavender, Seamus and Luna had also flown before but at least the two girls admitted they could probably use the practice. Dean had as well at the Club, but knew he needed work. Sally-Anne and Parvati had never flown before. Sally-Anne, of course, had never even known that she could and Parvati never had any interest in flying. Brooms were not a part of the mandatory Watanabe School’s course offerings, although one could take lessons at the expense of something else.

Harry had hoped it would just be Gryffindors in the class but knew the schedules for the First Years precluded each House having lessons on their own. He was somewhat disappointed to see they were with the Slytherins. He had no problems with Slytherins in general, something his Godfather and Remus would probably be shocked to learn. Then again, he had a fair few friends in that House from the Club. It was the non-Club Slytherins who fit the mold his parents’ generation would remember and who made class with that House less pleasant than it should have been.

As they reached the pitch, they saw the Slytherins were already there and Malfoy was apparently regaling them with fanciful stories about his prowess on the broom. Harry gathered that from the looks Daphne Greengrass and Theo Nott were giving the prat, Malfoy’s flying skills were more a matter of creative story telling. Daphne was

a fair flyer herself and Theo had alternated at Keeper with Ron in Juniors last season.

There was an older witch who walked onto the pitch carrying a broom. Several other brooms were laid out upon the grass in two rows and the witch stood between the rows.

“I’m Madam Hooch,” she announced to the whole group once she had most of their attention. “Welcome to your first flying lesson. Right! Line up with the broom to your right. Gryffindors to my right and Slytherins to my left. Hurry up then!”

“Why?” a voice asked.

“Excuse me?” Madam Hooch looked and saw Tracy Davis had asked the question.

“Why do we have to line up by Houses?” she asked.

“That’s just the way it’s done,” Madam Hooch replied seemingly stunned by the question. “Besides, it is well known Slytherins and Gryffindors don’t get along.”

“Big surprise,” Malfoy said. “Slytherins would never sully themselves with such filth.”

“Don’t you include us,” Millie growled.

“The lot of you are an embarrassment,” Malfoy said. “In my father’s day, no Slytherin would sink to being friends with a Gryffindor! It’s unnatural!”

“Speak for yourself,” Millie said. “You don’t speak for us!”

“And I wouldn’t speak for you Half Breed!”



“That’s ten points, Mr. Malfoy,” Madam Hooch said. “I will not tolerate such aspersions in my class! And that is why Slytherins and Gryffindors can’t get along,” she added as if it was a natural law.

“Rubbish,” Ron Weasley said. “I have good friends in Slytherin!”

“Who Weasel?” Malfoy said. “They should know better than to be friends with you, useless Blood Traitor...”

“Ten points, Mr. Malfoy,” Madam Hooch began.

“Stuff it Blondie,” Tracy said, “or do Daphne and I need to teach you another lesson?”

“Daphne?” a few Gryffindors asked.

“Well, letting Theo have a go at pretty boy would be no contest and Millie would be too cruel,” Tracy said.

“Squealed like a little girl he did,” Daphne said quietly, “for lack of a better expression.” The few who heard her giggled.

“It’s not Slytherins,” Ron said. “I do have a problem with useless gits, though.”

“Watch who you’re calling a useless git,” Malfoy started.

“I didn’t mean you, Blondie,” Ron sneered. “Calling you a useless git would be insulting to useless gits!”

“The name’s Malfoy!”

Madam Hooch stood there in shock as her class seemed to spiral out of control.

“Malfunction more like,” Ron said.

“Which was how his Mum explained how he came to be,” Daphne said in a low voice. It earned a laugh from those who heard.

“What’s so funny?” Malfoy asked.

“I don’t know, Malfunction,” Daphne said. “Could it be hearing tough guy talk from the boy who spends more time primping himself in the mirror than all the girls in Hogwarts combined?”

Madam Hooch watched the whole thing in stunned silence. She had never seen Gryffindors stick up for any Slytherin; much less the Snakes and Lions gang up on another Snake. She was, quite frankly, dumbfounded and still was in shock when Crabbe ran at Daphne. Whatever he intended, he did not get the desired result. He was met with a stunning flurry of fists and feet and was on the ground in a heap before Madam Hooch could even think of regaining control.

Madam Hooch walked over and quickly examined the boy.

“Did you have to break his nose?” she asked Daphne.

“It seems that lesser force hasn’t taught him his lesson,” Daphne said with a shrug.

“I’m afraid to ask,” Hooch said softly. “Still, we cannot have fighting. Ten points from Slytherin from Mr. Malfoy for starting this mess.”

“Me?” Malfoy protested. “It was the Weasel!”

“Another ten for contradicting a teacher and ten from Crabbe for physical aggression!”

She helped Crabbe to his feet. “I am taking Mr. Crabbe to the Hospital Wing. You are to remain here with your feet on the ground or so help me you’ll be out of Hogwarts faster than you can say Quidditch.” She turned and walked off the pitch with Crabbe in tow.

Malfoy turned on Goyle. “Why’d you just stand there?”

Goyle shrugged. "Don't fight girls an' don't like hospitals."

"You're pathetic!"

Goyle shrugged again and then did his best to ignore Malfoy altogether.

Malfoy looked at the others in shock, and then seemed to regain control of himself if only for a moment. "Well," he said smugly, "you losers can stay here on the ground, but I need some practice so I can flatten Gryffindors at Quidditch." He picked up his broom and then seemed to spy something. Before anyone could stop him, he walked over to Sally-Anne and ripped her necklace from her neck, causing her to fall to the ground as he mounted his broom and took off before anyone could stop him. Parvati knelt beside Sally-Anne who was crying.

"Give that back, Malfoy," Harry said with anger in his voice.

"Let the little Mudblood come and get it. I'll make it easy for the bint and leave it in a tree somewhere," Malfoy said with a smile.

Harry was on his broom in a moment flying at Malfoy who was too surprised to do anything. At first Harry did not realize he was not alone. He saw Malfoy's expression and turned to see that Ron, Neville, Seamus, Hermione Clarice and Luna were with him. "Give it back!" Harry growled realizing Malfoy was in no position to fly off. To his surprise, the git smiled.

"Glad so see where your loyalties lie," Malfoy said with a triumphant sneer.

Harry turned and saw his band of Gryffindors were not the only ones who mounted up and flew into the air. There were five other Slytherins with them: the four Club Members and Blaise Zabini.

"Don't fool yourself, Malfuction," Zabini said. "Now be a nice boy and give back whatever it was you took from Perks."

“Or else what?”

“If the Gryffs don’t knock you off that broom, we will,” Nott said.

“Like to see you try. Think I’ll dump the Mudblood’s precious chain in the lake. Not that you worthless lot can do anything! Back in the day, people like you lot were killed for kicks! It’s a pity we can’t put you out of your misery anymore. Not that it matters! You’ll never catch me. I’ve been flying since before...” Malfoy never finished the sentence. He had let go of his broom handle and his eyes flew open wide as the broom began to roll over. He made a grab for the handle and missed with a high pitched scream as he fell thirty feet to the ground below.

“Told you he squeals like a girl,” Daphne said with no remorse in her voice. “Damn!”

“What?” a few voices asked.

“He’s still moving. I guess dying was too much to hope for.”

“Remind me not to piss you off,” Seamus said as the group slowly landed.

The group was on the ground and Sally-Anne had her necklace back before any adults arrived. Malfoy was still crumpled in a head on the ground once Clarice had determined his injuries were not life threatening.

“What is going on here?” Professor McGonagall asked looking at the students milling about and Malfoy writhing on the ground some distance away. “What happened to him? Where’s Madam Hooch?”

“Madam Hooch had to take Crabbe to the hospital wing, Professor,” Hermione said.

“And what happened to Mr. Crabbe?”

“He walked into Daphne’s hands and feet,” Theo said. “It didn’t go well for him.”

McGonagall raised an eyebrow, but decided she would ask the instructor about that. “And Mr. Malfoy?”

“Wonder Boy decided to show us all he knew about flying,” Daphne said. “It seems all he knew was how to fall off a broom.”

“Fall off?” McGonagall asked. First Years did seem to suffer a fair few falls during flying lessons, especially the children who did not listen.

“He let go of the broom,” Tracy said. “Showing off, I suppose.”

McGonagall nodded. “Had he bothered to wait for Madam Hooch, he might have known better,” McGonagall said. “Some of the school brooms have ... quirks. They are flaws that show themselves when you let go which is why they are no longer used for Quidditch.”

“You teach on defective brooms?” Hermione asked.

“They are fine if the student does not let go,” McGonagall said. “Unless you are playing Quidditch, you really have no reason not to have one hand on the broom at all times. And where was Madam Hooch?”

“Hospital Wing,” Parvati said. “After Crabbe’s close encounter, she told us to stay on the ground and wait for her. Malfoy had other plans, apparently.”

McGonagall looked at the non Club Slytherins suspecting there was more going on than met the eye. They simply nodded in agreement.

“ Professor McGonagall?” a voice asked. Madam Hooch had returned.

“I hear there was an incident,” Minerva said.

“Named Malfoy,” Hooch nodded. “He was being insulting and disruptive and most of the other students were not standing for it. After one verbal exchange, Crabbe said Malfoy told him to attack Miss Greengrass for being disrespectful to him. The girl broke his nose.”

“And you made it clear that these children were to remain on the ground?”

“I did indeed. Where is Mr. Malfoy?”

McGonagall pointed. “It would seem he decided he did not need supervised instruction. It would also seem he was mistaken in that assumption. I’ll take him to Poppy. You may continue.”

“Yes Headmistress,” Madam Hooch said.

The rest of the lesson passed without incident.

Unfortunately, when the lesson finally let out, the entire group was met by both Professors McGonagall and Snape. They seemed very interested in what had transpired and it was clear Snape was in a particularly foul mood. Snape’s mood did not improve when the students were questioned. The students were all in agreement that Malfoy had begun the class by insulting Gryffindors. When some of his Housemates stood against him and tried to tell him off, he apparently set Crabbe on Daphne, to Crabbe’s unfortunate injury. After Hooch left for the Hospital Wing, Malfoy had disobeyed Hooch and the result was his falling from his broom. No one disagreed with the story, although there were three Slytherins who said little about what happened after Hooch left. The children were dismissed without further action.

“Well?” McGonagall asked.

“Well what?” Snape growled.

“Severus, much as I disapprove of it, I do know you are a legilimens and quite capable of passive legilimency. I also understand that with

time one probably cannot help but use that – er – talent. Were they lying?”

“It’s not that exact an art,” Snape said, “not without actually invading their thoughts which cannot be done passively. I can sense deception, evasion as well as occlumency or memory blocks, but cannot say with absolute certainty that any particular statement is a lie. If you, for example, were asked a direct question and answered it truthfully but had something unrelated that you were hoping to keep secret, I might detect deception. Likewise, were you to tell a half truth, one which answered the question truthfully but which did not volunteer additional information – the full story as it were – that can come across as not deceptive depending upon the individual. I find the skill of marginal use in this environment as almost every student has something to hide, even if they are not asked about it, particularly if I am not afforded the opportunity to interrogate the ... witness ... in private.”

“Your impressions anyway?”

“In regards to what happened to Mr. Crabbe, it did not take legilimency to know that Malfoy and Crabbe were lying. The story the rest told was too consistent to be a lie, unless the lot of them were under some sort of memory charm, and I detected nothing of the sort. I sensed no abnormal degree of deception from the others. The other two? Let’s just say they need to work on occlumency.

“As for Mr. Malfoy’s injury, it was also clear he was lying. The story we heard from the others was most likely incomplete, but at least partially true. I sensed deception from some, but not from most despite the consistency of the stories. That could be put down to nerves, for the other option, undetectable occlumency, while theoretical, is both rare and well beyond the ability of any so young. I do note Mr. Goyle, Miss Parkinson and Miss Runcorn were silent during that questioning suggesting there was more that had happened.”

“Sounds like guesswork,” McGonagall noted.

“Passive legilimency can near that,” Snape nodded. “A clear lie can be detected. But the truth spoken by one without a clear conscience for whatever reason will register as deceptive.

“Let’s say for the sake of argument that the objective truth was that Mr. Malfoy was not the only student who left the ground and the presence of other students contributed in some way to the fall. Under such circumstances, the story the others gave me was true, but incomplete. I would sense deception. But, as I said, let’s say that the story the students gave was the objective truth but the students were hiding other facts, such as missed homework assignments, feelings or other things. I would sense deception even though they were telling the truth about what happened here.

“But, one need not be skilled at legilimency to see that Malfoy lied. He told me that after Madam Hooch left the rest of the class, or at least most of them, beat him up for no reason. Now, Mr. Malfoy was found some thirty yards away from the other students. His broom was found near him, as if it had settled following the fall of the rider and Madam Pomfrey said his injuries were similar to what she deals with every year following Quidditch matches and not the results of a physical altercation. What the rest of the class told us might not be the truth, but it is far closer to the truth than the complaints of Mr. Malfoy.”

“I sense there’s more,” McGonagall said.

“Things have changed,” Snape said.

“Oh?”

“A few years ago, Mr. Malfoy’s behavior, while extreme for a First Year less than two weeks into his Hogwarts career, would not have been beyond the pale for some Slytherins. There are, in fact, students here who can remember such times here. What has changed is that the other houses, particularly the younger students, seem far less tolerant – for lack of a better word – than they were before. Moreover, such attitudes have certainly created a rift within my House. Before, Mr. Malfoy’s ... attitude ... was the vocal attitude



attributed to Slytherins and the rest of the House either supported it or said nothing.

“Now, such an attitude is likely to provoke ... a response ... not just from other Houses but from within the House itself. Whereas not five years ago, pride in the old, traditional, Pureblood ways was a part of Slytherin, with the younger students it seems to have become at best an embarrassment and at worst a “kick me” sign pinned to the student who voices such opinions. Moreover, while once we stood alone, my younger charges are unabashedly integrated within the school at large.

“Moreover, in the last few years, the attitude of the rest of the school towards my House has been changing. Before, Gryffindors hated Slytherins on principal and the other Houses chose to ignore Slytherins or backed Gryffindor. Now, the younger students do not see Houses as lines which are not to be crossed. Gryffindors might be more ... vocal ... in their opposition to the old attitude typified by some in my House, but that is not held against the others. Quite the opposite as today’s events seem to suggest. It would seem that the First Year Gryffindors and many of my First Year Slytherins stood as one against Malfoy and those who seemed to be in league with him.”

Minerva could not help but smile. “To what do you attribute this change, Severus?”

“There has been but one change in the last few years,” he replied. “I would note that the lines that appear to have been drawn today reflect that. This was not a Slytherin – Gryffindor confrontation of years past. It was your Club against those who likely would oppose your Club. You did say when you chose to sponsor this organization that it was dedicated to a greater sense of community through interaction between the schools in areas such as athletics, academics, and other positive social interactions?”

Minerva nodded.

“And that it was not open to all per se, but to all who could accept others without regard to their school, family, wealth or station?”

She nodded again.

“Do those things they wear on their collars have more significance than just their membership?”

Minerva nodded. “In a manner of speaking, they denote longevity and recognized accomplishments within the Club.”

“And I can assume that Mr. Potter is rather accomplished by Club standards?”

“He’s not the only one, but yes. He is one of our longest tenured members from Hogwarts.”

“Despite being a mere First Year?”

“The Club accepts magical children as young as age six, Severus. Mr. Potter ... joined ... at age eight, not long after that tragic incident...”

“He too, is not what I expected.”

“And what did you expect?”

“His ... unusual ... abilities at potions aside, I expected the son of James Potter. The only thing I see of the father in the boy is the uncanny, and for me somewhat unnerving, outward appearance. The boy, however, is not his father’s son. I have seen none of his father’s arrogance, vindictiveness, pettiness, cruelty or vanity. There are many at this school who would crave the fame Mr. Potter enjoys, and yet were you not aware that he is perhaps one of the most famous persons in our world today, you would not know it. It is as if he either does not know of his stature, or cares not a whit for it. Unusual. Even given his alleged history at the hands of those ... Muggles ... I would have expected something different.”

“Indeed,” McGonagall nodded. “I find him a bright, engaging and generous young man. Do I sense you may be developing a modicum of respect for the young man?”

Snape shook his head. “All other factors aside, he was still a pawn, wittingly or no, in one of Black’s schemes. I loathe and detest Black and harbor little respect for his minions. That being said, I see no reason to single Potter out at this time.”

“I am pleased to hear that.”

“That is not to say I do not reserve the right to change my ... attitude ... in the future.”

“I am sorry to hear that.”

Snape nodded. “I had entered this year in the hopes that Mr. Malfoy would be my House answer to your Potter. A foil, if you will. Alas, he has caused more trouble these first two weeks than the rest of my House combined. One would have thought he would have some sense. Whatever you might think about his father, you would have to admit the man knows how to keep a low profile and accomplish what he seeks to accomplish when he chose to.”

“Lucius is slippery and cunning,” McGonagall nodded. “Dangerous as a result.”

Snape nodded. “Unfortunately, his son inherited none of his skills and seemingly all of his vices. I would recommend his transfer, although I do not think the lad would survive in any other school. He needs to learn when to open his mouth and when to keep silent. He also needs to learn how to observe the situation around him. Waiving a red flag when surrounded by bulls is not the path to a long life.”

“And I was certain you would stand up for him like you always stand up for your charges,” McGonagall said with some surprise.

“I stand up for Slytherins,” Snape snorted. “Slytherins are cunning, ambitious, and not the types to stick their necks out without first

checking for a sword. Malfoy is a fool and would lose his head. I don't suffer fools, Minerva, regardless of their House. In two weeks, the little brat has managed to alienate every Slytherin in his year to one degree or another including Miss Parkinson. Those Slytherins in that Club of yours were first, followed by Mr. Zabini and Miss Parkinson. Today he lost the rest of them. Despite his own views on his abilities, Mr. Malfoy is neither good enough nor smart enough to make it through this school on his own. I dare say there are very few who ever have been."

"You singled out Miss Parkinson. Was there a reason?"

"There is a betrothal contract between her family and the Malfoys," Severus said, "one which might be reconsidered in light of recent events. Should that happen, and unless he changes, I would seriously doubt there will be any subsequent offers; at least not from a family that has anything to truly offer the Malfoys or Lucius."

"I see. Your recommendation Severus?"

"For now, I will deal with Mr. Malfoy."

"I leave it in your capable hands."

Draco lay in a bed in the hospital wing. He had suffered a broken arm, twisted knee and ankle, a dislocated shoulder and a concussion. As bad as he felt, he was lucky although he would never admit that. Had he landed head first, he might very well be in a box and not on a bed. Yet in his mind this was going to be a good day as Gryffindor was sure to be purged and Slytherin as well. Slytherins not supporting a Malfoy? It was unheard of and the traitors deserved the worst. He smirked when he saw Snape enter.

"They're going home, aren't they," he sneered as Snape stood looking down at him.

"Professor," Snape said.

“Excuse me?”

“Ten points, Mr. Malfoy. I am to be addressed as Professor. Are we clear?”

Malfoy looked shocked. Here he was lying in hospital and his head of house was docking points? “Yes ... Professor.”

“And who would be going home?” Snape asked.

“Weasley and his lot, Greengrass, Bulstrode, Zabini, Nott, Davis ... Professor.”

“It’s Friday night,” Snape said.

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Draco shot back. “Professor.”

“They are all members of a school sponsored Club that promotes athletics, academic excellence, social interaction and acceptance, or so I am told. They are effectively in some kind of class seven days a week most of the year as a result. As their Club apparently includes members from other schools, they meet off of school grounds somewhere. Provided it does not interfere with their studies, they are not in detention or otherwise have duties to perform or Hogwarts functions to attend, they have the privilege of being allowed to leave the school on weekends to attend to their other activities. As I understand, this can include ‘going home’ on Friday and Saturday evenings if their home has Floo access.”

“They get to go home on weekends? How do I join this club?” Malfoy asked rhetorically.

“You don’t. Right now they won’t take you. Even if they would, I would not let you.”

Malfoy’s mouth flapped for a moment before he regained his composure. “But surely someone is going to be expelled for what happened to me ... Professor.”

“Mr. Crabbe cannot corroborate your version of events, Mr. Malfoy. The other nineteen who might have witnessed what happened say you fell off your broom after disobeying a teacher or at the very least do not refute that version of events. No one says they or anyone else attacked you.”

“They’re lying!”

“Perhaps,” Snape drawled. “Then again, nineteen to one? It suggests someone else was lying to me,” he finished with a growl.

“Someone should be expelled!” Malfoy omitted saying “Professor.”

“The Headmistress and I discussed such a possibility, but I felt expelling you would not serve.”

“ME?” Malfoy shrieked. “Well of course she would think that...”

“It was I who raised the possibility,” Snape snarled. “You have become an increasing embarrassment to Slytherin and were that grounds to see you off, I would give it serious consideration. Fortunately for you, being an idiot is not grounds for your immediate expulsion. But you should consider yourself on notice. Even if you do not break a rule that in and of itself is grounds for your expulsion, you are well on the way to going home as a chronic troublemaker. At your current rate of racking up points and detentions, you will not be back after Christmas!”

Malfoy’s jaw flapped helplessly.

“Now,” Snape snarled, “unless it is your intention to live life as a wandless Squib for all intents and purposes, and if it is your desire to ever sit for your O.W.L.s, much less N.E.W.T.s, you will do exactly as I tell you without question. And do not think your father will help you! I have already apprised him of the situation. I am sure he is pleased to learn that his only son cannot survive Hogwarts...”

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

“So,” Harry said looking around the Club Corridor Conference Room, “Dumbledore was here for three hours and what happened on Friday never came up?” It was the weekly meeting of the Club leadership. The four faculty reps were present as were the Club Prefects and Harry and his closest friends.

“Mr. Malfoy’s injuries, while serious, were not life threatening,” McGonagall said. “Flying accidents in First Year are not unheard of. As his injuries and the events such as we knew them would not have justified the Chief Warlock’s postponement of the debate and a hiatus in the sequestration, Professor Snape and I felt it was not worth bringing to his attention. However, a slightly different fall from that height and we might well be talking about a much different outcome, Harry.”

Harry nodded. He knew she was right and had spoken with Millie afterwards. Apparently Malfoy and his lot had been harassing her since the start of the school year because she was a Half Blood, including several “pranks” that were deliberately cruel. Their treatment of Millie opened the rift in the First Year Slytherins and his actions on the Pitch ... Millie and the others had enough of “Malfunction.” Malfoy or one of his lot had lost a fight just about every day since school began, but seemed undeterred. Friday was the first day that any of that lot had been injured enough to need medical attention.

“What really happened?” McGonagall asked.

“It goes not farther than this room?” Harry replied.

She nodded. Harry told her exactly what happened, including what he had learned from Millie and the others about what Malfoy and his “followers” were up to behind the closed doors of the Slytherin Common Room. McGonagall and the other staff members paled when they were told about Malfoy’s final rant where he practically worshiped the dark times of the last War. She looked over at Hermione and the others and they nodded in agreement.

“I do not condone what happened,” McGonagall said. “On the other hand, that attitude Mr. Malfoy displayed is disgraceful and has been grounds for suspension since the War. If there are other like minded Slytherins, they have kept that attitude to themselves. I do hope you spoke to the others. As unacceptable as Mr. Malfoy’s conduct as been, we cannot have further incidents of such nature.”

Harry nodded. “I suggested that of there is a next time, we should consider a more ‘Slytherin’ response. I will not have one of my friends expelled because Malfoy is a loud mouthed bigot.”

“Malfoy is to be shunned,” Olivia Adair said.

“Shunned?” McGonagall asked.

“No one is allowed to talk to him or recognize his presence,” Olivia said. “It’s an age old Slytherin punishment reserved for those deemed unworthy of our House. Has not been used in decades, or so I’m told.”

“You’re idea?”

“The matter was put to a vote on motion of the Seventh Years,” Olivia replied shaking her head. “Per tradition, his classmates were not allowed to vote, although I doubt it would have changed anything. By tradition, if all Slytherins deem you unworthy, you are shunned. If even one disagrees, you are not. The vote was unanimous.”

“And how long does he remain ostracized?” McGonagall asked.

“His status will be put to a vote at the beginning of each term until it changes,” Olivia replied.

“Does Professor Snape know this?”

“I can’t say for certain,” Olivia replied. “Our Seventh Year Prefects are tasked with informing our Head of House as well as the shunned student.”



“Seems rather harsh,” Professor Sprout said.

“If you had seen him in our Common Room, you might not think so,” Olivia replied. “He all but demanded he be treated like some sort of prince and threw a fit when he was not. When I was a First Year, he might have gotten away with it. But the one thing the Club has done is curb the more overt Death Eater supporters. They have been fairly quiet of late and do not appreciate the unwanted attention Malfoy seems to attract. Add to it he has directly or indirectly cost us more House Points since the beginning of term than the rest of the House has earned ... we will be lucky if we end the year in distant third place for the House Cup. Professor Snape docked him another hundred points following the incident and then spoke with the whole House saying he was not going to make any effort to help us recover. We do have some right nasty bigots not named Malfoy, but they know better than to advertise that outside of the Common Room and they do not appreciate the hole Malfoy has dug for us whether they agree with him or not.”

McGonagall sighed. “Were I Albus Dumbledore, and I am not, I would probably launch into a lengthy discourse on the need to forgive and forget. While I agree with that philosophy in principal, I also recognize that as honorable as that concept is, it can also be taken to extremes. At some point, a person must realize they are accountable for what they do and say.”

“Malfoy assumed that his name or his father made him above accountability,” Olivia said. “That much was obvious from the start.”

“And hopefully he has learned that there comes a point when there is no one that can save you from yourself,” McGonagall nodded. “On the other hand, we should refrain from excessive retaliation such as happened in this case. If similar situations arise in the future, I would prefer they were brought to my attention before the matter reaches such a level of hostility.”

The students all nodded in agreement.

“Now, with that unpleasant matter discussed,” McGonagall said, “I had a lengthy meeting with the other faculty reps from the other schools Friday night. First of all, we are not the only school that is anticipating a significant increase in membership this year. Specific numbers will be forwarded via the Communications Parchments within the next couple of weeks, but we can expect between forty and fifty percent of all students in Britain could well be with us when the Club expands at the end of the month.”

“Approximate numbers?” Hermione asked.

“Thirteen hundred to seventeen hundred all told,” McGonagall replied.

“That’s not including Juniors?”

“That’s correct. Based upon what is known about the families of the students interested, we can guess that the Juniors may rise to as many as four to six hundred.”

“Office W know?” Harry asked.

“Sirius was present. Why?”

“That could easily be double the number we sent to Japan last year,” Harry said. “And that’s assuming we don’t send the Juniors who have not gone yet. The dorm we built was designed to house fifteen hundred assuming an average of slightly over two per flat. There is more than twice space per person there than in the dorms here, assuming Gryffindor is typical, so we could pack them in if need be. But Watanabe needs to know about such an increase to hire additional faculty. We need to be sure that we can pay for the increase...”

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

The meeting the night before covered other topics as well. But when morning broke, Harry and the others returned to what they now thought of as stealth student mode. Like anything of remote interest, the news about Malfoy had spread to the whole school by breakfast Monday morning, although it probably had spread by the time the school went to bed Friday night. Harry and his fellow Club members were long gone by then, either at home for that evening or at Camp W. In the case of Harry and several others, they had spent Friday and Saturday night at Potter House. Harry and Neville kept out of the way for the most part as it seemed Hermione and Clarice had invited most of the First Year girls who were in the Club for a sleep over. Okay, so maybe it was only slightly more than half, but much as Harry liked Hermione and his sister, that was just way too many girls to deal with at one time on his own.

Monday morning and it was back to the Hogwarts routine, if there was such a thing. Malfoy was still in the Hospital Wing and probably would be all week, thus if there were any Howlers from home, no one knew about them. What happened was well known in the Club, and the Club was doing their best to ignore it and keep things relatively quiet. Classes were classes and after Charms, Harry and the others retreated to the Club Corridor. Hermione worked on her spell while Harry and the others began to pour over the materials McGonagall had begun collecting on the Founders and hopefully the Founders' Tower.

Eventually the entire school (less Malfoy) was in the Great Hall for dinner. This was the only "formal" meal of the day where one could expect to see most every student present. Breakfast was open ended and students came and went as the meal time progressed. Lunch depended upon class schedules. There were two different lunch periods. While First and Second Years all ate between noon and one o'clock, the upper years ate when they could during the Uppers Period which began at eleven-thirty and continued through one-thirty. (Lucky upper years had the Long Lunch and ate at their leisure. Most only had an hour to enjoy the food.) Dinner was the one meal where all students (and most staff) were present so it was the time when any announcements were made.

"Your attention please?" McGonagall began.

Most all of the students stopped talking; many wondering if this was about Malfoy.

“As most of you are aware, this past Friday the announcements were posted in your Common Rooms concerning Quidditch try-outs for your House Teams this year which will begin next week.”

She had to wait for the cheering to continue before continuing.

“The first match will be Slytherin...” a cheer arose from their table “...versus Gryffindor...” and the Gryffindors echoed the cheer “...which will take place Saturday, November Ninth. The remaining dates and matches will be posted in your Common Rooms tomorrow.

“For all Third Years and above, the first Hogsmeade Weekend is scheduled for Saturday, October twenty-sixth.” After another cheer erupted from the Hall and died down, she continued. “Third Years please make sure your permission forms are turned into your Heads of House well in advance.

“Now, as most of you are aware, for the last two years there has been a rather large Club active here at Hogwarts. What many of you may not know – but might well suspect – this Club is but a part of a larger Club of young people like yourselves from all over Britain. For the last two years, the Club has had its own Quidditch League with two teams from each of the six magical schools participating. One of the Teams, known as the Senior Team, has players attending school. The other or Junior Team has players too young to be in school. These matches occurred at the Club’s property and were not open to non-Club attendance.

“In consultation with the other School Heads, this policy has changed. The W.I.S.E. Senior League matches will be played at the schools.” There was cheering again, mostly from the Club members.

“Participation in W.I.S.E. League is currently limited to Club members,” McGonagall said. It was clear at least some students were disappointed. “This is because the League is not financed by any

school. Tryouts therefore are so limited. It should be noted that First Years may try out, but only if they have prior experience in the Junior Leagues. This is for your safety. Furthermore, it should be noted that personal brooms are not allowed unless your broom meets the standard for that position in the League. No team is allowed an advantage in the quality of their equipment. So don't run out and buy a broom unless it is the specific make and model specified for your position.

“Many of you may wonder whether participation in the League precludes you from playing on your House Teams as well. This has not been the policy the last two seasons, however I shall allow each Head of House make their own rules in that regard. Such rules shall be posted on your Common Room Notice Boards by this time tomorrow.

“I shall now let our senior League member explain in more detail. Mr. Wood?”

Oliver walked up and began to explain the differences between W.I.S.E. League rules and normal Quidditch rules. The biggest was that normal Quidditch only ended when a Seeker caught the Snitch. While this held true for W.I.S.E. League as well, the game had time limits. The game was divided into two now ninety minute periods with a break in between. If the Snitch was not caught within that time, the score at the end of “Regulation” controlled. In the event of a tie, teams would exchange penalty shots until one team outscored the other.

Most teams in normal Quidditch started seven players and no substitutions were allowed except on direction of the referee should the game run too long. W.I.S.E. League allowed for liberal substitutions. Chasers and Beaters could be changed out at any time during the match. Keepers now could be changed as well at any time, unless the team was defending against a penalty shot. Seekers could only be replaced upon injury to the starter or upon start of the Second Period.

As a result, W.I.S.E. League allowed each team to rotate up to nine Chasers, six Beaters and three Keepers now. The teams were only allowed two Seekers. Wood explained that experience had shown that having a strong starting “Line” was not as important as having a “deep reserve” as the more players one played, the less tired they were.

There had been a revision to the penalty rules. The prior season “minor” penalties resulted in a penalty shot and “major” penalties resulted in both the shot and the expulsion of the offending player from the match with the offending team having to play one man down at that position for the remainder of the game. There was this year a new “intermediate” class of penalties. Again, these resulted in a penalty shot for the other team. The offending player would be benched for three minutes of play, during which his team would play a man down at that position. Upon expiration of the penalty period, the player (or a replacement) could return to the game and the team could play at full strength. The penalties were categorized to promote sportsmanlike conduct and ensure relatively safe play.

Wood then talked about tryouts. Twenty players would be designated as the Game Team which would play the matches. There was also space for an additional fourteen reserves, two at each payer position, which would practice with the team but would not play in games. These were the “future” players (probably First and Second Years) and from their ranks replacements could be drawn should a member of the Game Team be ineligible for the next match due to academics, detentions, illness or other incapacity.

“Right then,” Wood said, “the games! Hogwarts will play six games during the regular season, three here and three at the opposing school. For our home games, arrangements will be made to allow any interested family members to attend and we will be hosting not just the opposing team, but students and family from that school as well. Our first home game is here against St. George’s London on Sunday, November 11th. Our other home games are against St. Alban’s (the Welsh) on Sunday, February 16th, coincidentally right after our first Hogsmeade Weekend of next year and our last home game is against St. Patrick’s (the Irish) on April 19th.

“As I said, our other games are at the other schools. In addition to the team, all faculty may attend and any students who are either in the Club or have Hogsmeade privileges and upon approval of their Head of House. Our first away game is at St. Andrew’s (Scotland) on December 15th; next we’re at Preston Academy (England) on the Ides of March; finally we play in London against St. George’s on May 17th.

“If we do as well as last season, we will play in the League Finals at a location to be determined on June 7th. If we do as well as our Junior team did last Season, we will actually win it!”

Wood then said the goal was roughly an equal number of players from each House and as coach; he would not be one of the players so there were five Keeper slots open (three on the Game Team and two additional Reserves). Ideally, there would be five Game Team players from each house and between three and four from each house on the reserve squad. The school team would thus consist of a total of twenty Game Team players and fourteen reserves which meant there were more regular players for the school than on the House Teams. Tryouts would begin on Wednesday and run through Friday so that the team might be set or near set by the time the House Teams began tryouts next week, and yes Wood would be playing for Gryffindor.

Once Wood stepped down and the meal began, and much to Hermione’s chagrin, the only topic of conversation seemed to be Quidditch. While she enjoyed watching games and cheering for her friends, she was not a big fan of that subject for dinner conversation. She was in a very small minority, most of whom were First Year Muggle Borns who still had no idea what the game was about. The Quidditch purists (and there were always a few) grumbled about the strange rules and the fact that the W.I.S.E. League seemed to marginalize the importance of Seekers while the Club members argued that the new rules made the other positions more than just window dressing to entertain fans while the Seekers looked for the Snitch. But the discussions clearly showed that the school as a whole was enthusiastic about this new concept.

THUS ENDS THE CHAPTER. STORY CONTINUES WITH CHAPTER 12. WHAT FOLLOWS IS A TIME THEORY BIT BECAUSE IT GIVES ME A HEADACHE. It is a humorous (I hope) juxtaposition.

(For those who have read a previous theory of time I have written, and there are very few who have: No, this one has nothing to do with Wal-Mart causing the end of the Universe.)

Time travel stories have to eventually deal with the problem of how can you change time and what will happen if you do. One idea is that time is truly linear so if you go back and change anything, it might be a problem because maybe that change was one that made it so one day you'd have no reason to go back and change it and if you had not reason to you wouldn't so how could you have changed it in the first place... (writer passes out from mental overstimulation.) This is known as the Time Paradox.

Another theory is time is not truly linear such that if you go back, you merely create an alternate timeline that coexists with the first. But if you went back to change the first, yet you wind up in a totally different and unrelated one, then why'd you even bother in the first place because you really didn't change anything? It would be like not liking the carpets in your living room and instead of changing them, you move to another living room and act like you changed them, which is both incredibly expensive (assuming you paid for it) and very silly and in reality changed nothing because the ugly carpet is still there, it's just you that is not. (writer bangs head on table and passes out.)

Then there is my plot device/theory because reality sucks. In this time is kind of linear in a strange way. We begin with Timeline A.

Timeline A begins billions and billions of years ago ... which really does not look all that impressive in print. Now, when Carl Sagan said that, it sounded really, really impressive. But he kept saying that and it got kind of creepy, especially as while billions got him excited, trillions and quadrillions made him absolutely giddy. But he died, so this is all as academic as he was...



Anyway, Timeline A begins a long, long time ago ... which is not as impressive, nor as creepy ... with something someone a long, long time later would call the Big Bang because it sounded cool and people seemed to remember it. Before the Big Bang, there was no Timeline A. Wasn't anything else either. After the Big Bang, there was everything. Or at least there was everything from which everything would become everything someday. But at first, everything was energy and little bits of really small stuff called matter (not right after the Big Bang, cause things were really weird then, so this is sometime after right after but still a long, long time ago – and if you don't think I have any idea, just ask the people who thought this stuff up and then your brain will melt.)

Anyway, the little bits of small stuff thought the other bits were pretty attractive through a strange lust potion called gravity and started gathering into bigger and bigger groups until they got so big they became great big balls of fire that one day someone would call stars for no known reason other than the word sounded cool. The stars produced light, heat and such until they blew up like huge fireworks as the first object lesson in the risks of playing with fire. All that was left were the little bits, but now there was also bigger little bits that one day would be rocks and stuff.

Skip forward a long time and there is a star that is otherwise forgettable in a forgettable corner of a forgettable galaxy. (When there are Billions and Billions of these things, they are easy to forget.) Circling around this star was a big, rocky clump of those little bits. It circled because it really had no better place to be at the time and never bothered to find one later. Now compared to a lot of things out there, this ambitionless rock was actually tiny. But compared to you or me, it was really, really big and we can't get away from it. If you want proof, just try jumping away. You always come back down to what someone else would one day call Earth. Gravity can be such a drag.

For reasons of fortune, destiny or blind luck, depending upon one's philosophical stance on such things, (and this is Timeline A, so whether you believe this ... this is a work of fiction in the end [author blows raspberry]), anyway, this rock was located in a zone near its star someone would one day call the Goldilocks Zone. Maybe this

someone thought it was cool. But why anyone would name anything after a fictitious girl who plays with ravenous bears – which is scary on several levels – is beyond me. But why this zone might matter is that it was not too hot or too cold (getting back to crazy bear girl and something about porridge) so water could exist on the surface of the rock.

Now, this wasn't water you would want anyone to drink (except maybe your worst enemy) because it was polluted with all kinds of nasty stuff because almost everything dissolves in water. Included was a nasty goo someone would one day call amino acids so he could sound smart and win a sounding smart prize. These would eventually be stewed and stirred by wind and waves and such and become another thing someone would call protein to get his name published in a book most people don't read. Eventually, it would get a lot more complicated, generating more sound smart prizes and books few people read and these protein based things that were now so complex that only the most twisted mind (aside from aforesaid sound smart types) would try to pronounce and they (the unpronounceable things) would begin eating stuff and one day would begin copying themselves like a Xerox machine, but that has another word that author does not feel like looking up, much less spelling. Once this happened, it became what someone would later call "life" (but I don't think that person got any prizes or obscure book deals).

Over the next billion years or so (finally away from the multi-billions!) life did what life does. It's also kind of funny, this life thing, because over time it likes to change into something completely different than it was before. But this takes a long, long time and you'd have more fun watching grass (another one of those life thingies) grow. One day, there was a strange life form that came into being had had two legs fur on its head and nowhere else. This made it unique. Everything else that had only two legs at the time (assuming something hadn't eaten the other two, which happened) had feathers all over and many of them could fly. But the furless two legged thing could not fly and someone would also fail to get any prizes or book deals for calling it "man."

Now being furless was great when you lived in a hot place. But man liked to travel ... many still do ... billions and billions are spent on it

every year ... and if you travel far enough you come to places that are not so hot and not having fur is no fun at all. But man was both smart and cunning and saw loads of other animals that had fur. And man had pointed sticks the animals did not have... hmmm. Problem with taking fur from an animal is unless you take the skin too, it tends to get all over the place and blows away when the winds come. So man adds some sharp rocks and takes skin and fur so he now has fur, if not truly of his own. Animal, of course, does not tend to survive a skin and fur ectomy (a word I just made up, but probably won't get any prize or book deal for). But, now skinless animal is good eating, if somewhat raw.

One day a man whose name is lost to history was rubbing to sticks together because it was a way to pass the time in the days before television, books, toys, or anything really, and to his surprise he had FIRE. (Another word without prize or book deal). Fire was warm! Fire was good! And throwing skinless dead animal bits on a fire for just long enough gave you bar-be-que! Yum! Yum!

(Getting Back to story Timeline A). One day another man (or woman, for no one really knows) saw fire and agreed it was cool (as in likeable), but thought the whole stick rubbing thing was a bit much. He or she snapped her fingers and ... FIRE! In time, the stick rubbers would be called Muggles and the finger snappers Witches and Wizards, again words with no prizes or book deals at that time (but years later someone would make billions and billions with those words, thus out earning the word makers for Star, Earth, Life, Man, Fire and so on and people actually read those books).

For a long while the stick rubbers and finger snappers got along until some stick rubber invented things called emperors, taxes, armies, and other not so pleasant things. I mean, well maybe they were fine if you were that emperor thing. Anyone else, and life pretty much was no fun at all and the finger snappers wanted nothing to do with any of that which, in time, found the stick rubbers piling sticks up, rubbing sticks together to get the stick to catch fire so they could throw finger snappers on the fire and have a picnic – another stick rubber idea the finger snappers did not find all that amusing. But I digress.

Now man, whether a stick rubber or finger snapper, measures time because once he had pointed sticks and even fancier stuff, he soon had too much of it on his hands. One unit of time is a year. This was once the time from when it was really, really cold, through went it might actually be warm enough to shed the stolen animal fur, until it was really, really cold again and all people had these big feasts because they were afraid it would never get warm again, but it always did. And then it got cold again. Guess those people were the glass-is-half-empty type. Anyway, it is also the about of time for that rock in the place named after mauling bear girl take to go around the star called the Sun. The year has twelve months. Why twelve? Because there's this other rock that goes around the bigger rock about twelve times a year called the Moon. (Do I need to say no prize or book for that word?) Now in this language (which no one got a prize for making up, but many get one for using – go figure) these months have names. These names are for gods no one worships anymore and for emperors few remember and who ruled people who never even spoke this language. They spoke Latin, but since Latin means you're smart ... Latin it is. These months have days. This is the period it takes for that star we circle to rise and set in the sky and come back again. Some months have 30 days, some 31 and one lunatic month has 28 days most of the time (then again, it is perhaps the most depressing time of the year, so why not a short month?) except when it has 29 (done to torture kids born on that day because they can only have a real birthday once every four years while the rest get them every year. There have been a lot of cruel people.).

Anyway, one day another person who got no prizes decided each year should have its own number. Now this made sense! Before then, a year was something like the 3rd Year of the XXIV Olympiad or the 6th Year of the Reign of Emperor Tiberius, which were about as useful as XXIV was as a number (24). (Why people think the Greeks and Romans were smart is beyond me. They had impossible numbers and confusing years. It's no wonder the barbarians were at the gates!)

Skip forward and we get to the relevant parts of Timeline A. The year was 1979. The stick rubbers had some powerful rulers (or so some thought). In one country, it was a former farmer who farmed stuff he was allergic to. In another it was a woman whose voice reminded

people in the first country of another woman who had a famous cooking show. In a third was a man the other two feared named Leonid Breznev, who looked like he was dead. Given that the finger snappers could animate the dead, maybe he was. He did look like bits were dropping off of him at the time. Now these stick rubbers are not important, just setting the scene, sort of:

Timeline A: the relevant bits:

September 1979: Hermione Granger is born, and books cower in fear.

1980: Prophecy is made about evil wizard dude and a baby – not to be confused with a movie called Three Men and a Baby which was not at all related and came out some years later.

In July: Neville Longbottom is born. Harry Potter is born.

In September: Luna Lovegood is born.

1981: In July Clarice Potter is born.

October 31: The Potters' parents are murdered by aforesaid evil wizard who then blows up or something and Dumbledore (purported good wizard, with friends like him you really don't need enemies) decides to ruin a few lives.

November 1: Clarice is left with Child Welfare for adoption. McGonagall casts a house in Surrey and Harry is left there.

November 2: The evil Dursleys open the gates of hell to little Harry. Sirius Black chucked in prison to show the people the government is doing something...

Later in November, minions of evil wizard ruin Neville and his parents' life 'cause they hated Mondays. In unrelated news, Clarice is adopted by the Jamesons.

SKIP

June 1987. Clarice's adoptive father dies of cancer.

May 5 1988 (write this one down as the day after it comes back later).  
Dursleys beat Harry half to death to begin their holiday.

May 1988. Clarice and Mum in auto accident. Mum dies. Clarice is sent to foster care.

June 1988: Nothing happened. Not a thing. Said to have been the most boring month in this chapter supplement.

July 31 1991. Harry learns he is a wizard.

September 1 1991. Harry goes to Hogwarts, meets Neville, Hermione and Ron Weasley and begins having all kinds of adventures that made for thrilling books.

August 1992: Clarice learns she's a witch and starts St. George's magic school in London.

September 1992: Luna Lovegood starts Hogwarts, but does not meet Harry for another few years.

July 1993: Sirius Black escapes Azkaban in his own magic fur.

June 1995. Voldemort (aforesaid evil wizard and over all party pooping guy) returns.

June 1996: Sirius Black is killed and Harry has a breakdown.

June 1997: Dumbledore is killed. The fashion police celebrate.

August 1997: The Muggle Born registration begins.

September 1997: Clarice is arrested as a Muggle Born and deported to the camps (Timeline A people, stay with me!)

February 1998: Clarice dies in the camps.

May 1998: Harry "kills" Voldemort and there was much rejoicing. Here endeth aforesaid books. Happily ever after, right?

September 1, 2017: Epilogue in those books that made billions and billions. Harry has married Ginny and has three kids. Ron has married Hermione (goodness knows what she was taking at the time) and has two kids.

2027: Voldemort returns again. Some people should stay dead.

2029 – 2042: Third Voldemort war. Ron disappears. Hermione's kids, Ginny and Harry's kids, Neville and Luna all die. Okay, that's a bit depressing...

2042: War ends when Voldie is killed once and for all but war provokes stick rubber intervention. Magical laws are passed and the finger snappers, while not burnt, lose freedom. Harry and Hermione have already begun time work in the Redoubt in the remote pacific.

2048 – 2050: dates approximate. "Luna" and "Neville" are born into slavery. They are not siblings.

2055: Global Nuclear War destroys London and kills Hermione. Harry finds "Luna" and "Neville" and takes them to his Redoubt.

Around 2070: Automated defense systems wipe out rest of the world. Only Redoubt remains.

June 2077: "Neville" sent back to change the past. Nothing seems to happen.

December 2077: "Luna" sent back to change the past. Nothing seems to happen. Harry pushes forward on Avatar Project.

2148: Harry activates his Avatar and sends it back in time to change the past. TIMELINE A ENDS.

May 6, 1988 TIMELINE B. Avatar arrives at #4 Privet Drive and Changes Everything.

Okay, maybe that makes a little more sense or none at all. But thinking about the detailed implications of time travel is a known

cause of spontaneous human combustion, so please keep your hands and feet inside the cars at all times and enjoy the ride.



## CHAPTER TWELVE: HINTS

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19th, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

It would just figure, Harry thought, that Hermione's birthday would fall on a Thursday when we have to suffer through three hours of Snape. What little Harry had seen of the man, and fortunately it was a little, told him that the man was probably a fine field Master, but he was a failure in the academic setting. Harry had no idea if the man was capable of research, but as he purportedly held a Mastery, he probably was. Whether he was any good at it was another matter entirely.

Still, things could be worse, Harry supposed. He had heard all sorts of horror stories about Snape as a Professor. He had a taste of the man's petty and vindictive styles the first week and his total disdain for teaching the second, but since that first week, Snape had left him and his friends alone. This class was only worthwhile because most of them didn't need it. Sally-Anne was getting loads of help from her roommates so at least she would learn potions, if not in this classroom. Harry wondered how many potential potioners had passed through this school over the last decade or so to never develop that talent.

Once again, Snape left two potions on the board and sat at his desk as the glorified babysitter not saying a word until time was called, not explaining anything useful, not teaching. Once again, when time was called, he merely checked the various cauldrons. One no knew if you got your potion right, the man frowned and grumbled out "acceptable" and said nothing else. While he was not docking points left and right, as he was said to have done in the past, neither did was he awarding any. The only thing that drew a reaction from Snape was a botched potion, which for now was the forte of three of the Slytherins in the class. At least that Malfoy brat was still in hospital.

All things considered, Harry would rather skive off this class and the rest of Thursdays altogether. The problem was that skipping class would be noticed. He could work on revising some research he and the others were doing in History of Magic and to a lesser extent in

Astronomy, but this was a practical class and he could not revise and brew at the same time. Still, he had some time as he could brew the assigned potions perfectly and in less time than required and when his were finished, he would go over his notes.

“This is not a study hall, Mr. Potter,” Snape said towering over him. “You’re supposed to be making a hiccup potion.”

“It’s done, Sir,” Harry said.

“So I see. So might I suggest reading ahead for the next lesson?”

“Already have, Sir.”

“Then perhaps the next one?”

“I’ve already read the whole book,” Harry replied.

“I see. Then tell me what is written on page 417.”

“Er...”

“Five points, Mr. Potter, for using this time for something other than potions.”

Harry nodded. The legendary Snape had apparently not become extinct. He placed his notes back in his bag, opened his potions book and pretended to read as Snape moved on to loom over someone else.

He chose to think about Quidditch. Seeker tryouts for the school team were on Tuesday. No one was surprised that Harry made the Game Team. Cho Chang from Ravenclaw was the only other. She had played backup to Harry in Juniors two seasons ago. Last year’s Senior Seeker, Tamara Marks who was a Fourth Year Puff, had not tried out. She said she had gotten too big to be any good at that position and was trying for Chaser. Harry wondered what the girl had meant by that and decided he really should be too young to dwell on that part of the female anatomy.

McGonagall had allowed Club members to play for Gryffindor as well, assuming they made the House Team. Then again, she knew that most of the Club Members already had at least their O.W.L.s and did not need the same amount of time to study. Harry was told as soon as that notice went up he was Seeker if he wanted it. For reasons having nothing to do with Quidditch he had accepted. As it now stood, the Gryffindor Team was all in the Club. Oliver Wood was Captain and Keeper. Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson were Chasers from last season, and Fred and George Weasley were last season's Beaters. Only Chaser remained and as everyone who was not named McLaggen in the House knew, it would not be McLaggen. Harry's "money" was on another Club Member: Katie Bell. His sister was probably better, but she was a First Year and wanted to wait until she was "bigger" (Harry assumed this meant taller and stronger and not other things) before she tried for a starting position. She was going to try for Reserve Chaser for the school and for Gryffindor if Wood wanted reserves for scrimmages.

Hermione stared at her potions book as well. It was her birthday and she was pleased to find flowers in her part of the dorm when she woke up that morning. It was a little odd having so many people wishing her a Happy Birthday, but she did not mind. Harry had met her in the Common Room before breakfast and had given her a surprisingly big and very nice kiss in front of everyone – for her birthday, he had said. She knew the presents would come later. They were going to hold her party tomorrow at her home in London and everyone was holding off until then. It was a pity she had to have this class on this day.

She stared at the potions book as her completed potion simmered and went over her mental checklist. She was sort of in charge of research for the group, which really meant she made sure the others were moving forward with their projects. Her project was that bloody spell. She was sure it would work one day, but the arithmancy behind it would fry brains and it would be all but impossible to cast outside of laboratory conditions, just as she had originally suspected. However, it looked like it could be adjusted so that it could be a charged spell, which meant she could pre-load wands with it. Good thing to, she thought. Even if it were possible to cast "in the field" it

would be bloody well near impossible to teach to others within the timeframe she was working. It had to be ready and loaded by November 9th, assuming Harry played for Gryffindor or the 17th if he only played for the school. Those were the dates of the matches and unless something had really changed, Quirrell would try to kill Harry during Harry's first match of the year.

Creating this spell all on her own by that timeframe was a long shot. She had to finish the theoretical crafting, conduct "static" tests to determine whether it appeared to be working and all that before any kind of live test. A live test was possible, so long as it was not Quirrell as test subject as the theoretical effect on an un-possessed individual seemed to be both harmless and a known and quantifiable factor. Only then could she begin loading, which probably would take days as the spell looked like it would be very draining. Fortunately, she had help. While Luna might not be a Certified Spell Crafter, she was a student working towards her own Mastery and was quite capable of acting as assistant (for which Luna could get credit in that program.)

There was still the problem of whether Quirrell was under active possession. She thought he was, but had not proof. That was Clarice's job – well, Clarice and Madam Pomfrey. They needed to know that. First of all, unless he was under active possession, they could not justify killing him and could probably use the purification ritual used on Harry to excise that demon Voldemort. The problem with the ritual was the possessed person had to enter into it of his own free will and needed very close friends for it to work. (And there was that whole naked bit and Hermione really did not want to see that.) More critically, her spell would not work as hoped unless Quirrell were under active possession.

While she and Luna had been spending practically all of their spare time running the arithmancy for the "Love Spell" as Hermione was calling it; Harry, Neville and Clarice had been pouring over books, manuscripts and records that McGonagall had been dropping off almost daily. They were going over every document McGonagall could find within the school's library and archives for any information about the Founders, the nature and magic (if any) associated with being a Founder's Heir, what might happen if all four Heirs were reunited and claimed their birthrights and the Founders' Tower. True,

of those three, only Harry had a direct interest in the result of that project. The five of them had proven he was the magical Heir of Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin about two years ago. Neville was one of the closest living alternate claimants to the Gryffindor patrimony, but that did not matter as much.

The research that proved that Harry was magical heir of Slytherin also proved that Voldemort was not and could not be that so long as Harry lived. Were Harry to die without having fathered a child, Voldemort was next in line (despite not having a common ancestor within the last 800 years or so.) Legally, Voldemort was known as a disputed or contested claimant. Voldemort had tried to wipe out the entire Potter line during the last War and would have come after Harry without regard to that useless prophecy. But that was an effort to wipe out the Gryffindor heir. The Potters never hid the fact that they were the holders of the Gryffindor line.

Later research showed to the group that either Voldemort or those he used were lousy at genealogical research. Then again, the idiot did surround himself with Pureblood Supremacists and they were the type who would discount anything that suggested Purebloods were not special or, it seems, reach any conclusion that suggested Voldemort might have been wrong about anything. The Death Eaters had gone after two lines: Gryffindor and Ravenclaw. Both were lines that were known and public. Even then, they made no effort to take out other more distant claimants. Neville and his family were targeted not because of their connection to a founder, but because of that prophecy. No effort was made to hunt down the Hufflepuff line at all. Hopefully, their sloppy work would cost Voldemort dearly in the end.

Legal heirs had the right to the legal property of their ancestors, Hermione remembered. Legal heirs were determined by the laws of men as they existed when each person in chain died and his or her property passed to the next generation. The laws of men allowed a father to designate his successor so it did not follow that the oldest son was always an heir. It was through the laws of man that a younger son of the direct heir of Salazar Slytherin became the legal heir of that heir. The older son inherited no property. Harry was the most direct male descendent of that older son. Voldemort, the most direct descendent of the younger son.

Magical heirs were always the most direct descendent of their ancestor, but no witch could be the magical heir of a wizard and no wizard the magical heir of a witch. If a magical wizard heir had no sons, but had daughters, the line was "held" by the oldest daughter and her descendants until a son was born and that son would be the next magical heir even if the last one was generations prior. Magical heirs inherited all of the "magical" property of that line and as their status was through the laws of magic or nature, they could never be disowned by any ancestor. Thus, generations ago, a witch who was the "place holder" for the magical line of Slytherin married the wizard who was the magical heir of Gryffindor. They had a son, who became the magical heir of both and Harry was the closest male descendent of that son.

Hermione, on the other hand, was the magical heir of Rowena Ravenclaw, or at least one of them. As her magic was witch magic, only the closest witch descendant could inherit. If a heir had only boys, the oldest boy became the place holder until a daughter was reborn in that line. Where the line sat with a place holder, it was said to be dormant. If a line died out, magic sought the next closest surviving line, even if that line was ten or more generations removed. Long periods of dormancy or the end of the primary line tended to leave the next "heir" ignorant of their status. The Ravenclaw line had no such problems and Hermione had learned about her status when she was told about her blood family three years earlier.

Her question now was how did her great-grandmother fit into the picture? Robert and Rose Granger were and always would be her parents. They had loved, supported and raised her from when she was but days old. But they were her parents by adoption. Her birth mother was for a short time the Heir of Ravenclaw after the remainder of Minerva McGonagall's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren had been killed by Death Eater in the last War. Her birth parents died as well, barely two weeks before that terrible war ended. Hermione was pretty certain she was now the Heir, as she could produce the next generation (one day) and Minerva could not. But she did not know for certain. The only way to know for sure was to try and claim the "magical property" she was entitled to as an heir.

Hermione had learned that what constituted magical property was nowhere near as clear as the notion of legal property (which was also not simple by any means). Certain magical abilities had been shown to be a species of magical property. Being a Seer was a gift that only passed to the magical heirs of other Seers, for example. But other gifts were family gifts and passed to all descendants of the magical witch or wizard. Apparently Parselmouth, the ability to speak with snakes, was a family gift such that all descendants of a snake talker had the gift. Slytherin had the gift, as did Harry and Voldemort and Harry's sister Clarice. What was the magical property of the Founders?

The last of the magical heirs was Luna Lovegood. She was the Heir of Helga Hufflepuff. Like the Slytherin line, due to dormancy and the extinction of senior lines many generations removed, the Hufflepuff line had been forgotten. Luna was the first daughter in that line in many generations. Luna would come into her "inheritance" (or at least become able to claim it) in two days. On September 21st, she would turn eleven and as there were no older witches in her line, she could claim all rights at that time, whatever those rights were.

Which left Hermione with a nagging question: how did "Aunt Minnie" fit into the picture. She had been the magical heir. Was she still? Did that matter?

One thing was certain, due to dormancies in the various lines, it had been hundreds of years since all four magical heirs of the Founders were alive at the same time. Even then, they probably did not even know it and were of different ages altogether. This might be the first time since not long after the Founders time that all four heirs were about the same age. Did that mean something?

One nice thing about being Harry Potter was he had his own room in the Club Corridor. Okay, he thought, that was not exactly true. But he had a room he shared with some others for their projects. Other Club members could ask to enter and he and the usual occupants usually left the door open, but there were times such as now when they were working on things that were not for general consumption.

The Weasley Twins had dubbed the room “The Command Center,” yet while everyone understood what they meant, no one else said that. The rest of the Club, which meant just about everyone, called it “The Triple Eight Room.” Unlimited access was granted only “to those Triple Eight or better.” This referred to the numbers on the left collar. The five who had unrestricted access all had three eights on their collars, and Harry, Hermione and Clarice had four. True, Susan Bones and Dora were also Triple Eights and did not have unrestricted access.

In reality, the Weasley Twins might be closer to why they had a room. Harry and the other four were senior Club members who had dealt with all of the Club from the beginning, not just the Hogwarts bit. But unless something actually happened that required their attention, and aside from going public with their Quidditch League nothing had (and that was handled by the faculty advisors. All Harry did was set the schedule, which he had done even before Hogwarts had started), they used the room for their other projects such as spell crafting, the two Sunday meetings and the reason the five had gathered just after dinner.

For now, Harry and Hermione were the only ones in the Triple Eight Room and contrary to speculation, they did not use the room for steamy snogging sessions, although neither said anything to refute the rumors. The others were off elsewhere, but would be arriving to go over the Founders research later.

“So,” Harry sighed looking over his notes, “you think Malfoy was like he is the last time?”

It was off topic, Hermione thought, and Harry knew she did not like such distractions. But she knew he was not going to “talk business” until the others arrived. “You mean a brainless, bigoted git,” Hermione replied, “or the school leper?”

“I was thinking the brainless bit,” Harry said. “From what Sensei said in his stories, Malfoy was hated by just about anyone outside Slytherin...”



“Probably inside as well,” Hermione said. “And I would not be surprised if there’s little difference in their personalities.”

“So he was a loud mouthed, stuck up little snot then too?”

“There was only one change in his life before Hogwarts,” Hermione said. “This version of Malfoy’s dad is a convicted Death Eater.”

Harry nodded. “Yeah. The other one would be one in a few years. Still, you’d think he’d keep his head down with that being known.”

“Not if he’s proud of it for some reason,” Hermione said. “Why do you care about that prat?”

“I don’t,” Harry said. “I care about our friends who have to live with him. Pity he can’t spend the year in the Hospital Wing. Just wondering.”

“Okay,” Hermione said, “I’ll bite.”

“If he was the same way last time,” Harry said, “then why did Sensei have such problems with him?”

“Sensei knew nothing about magic.”

“Still, I mean he also had three more years with the Dursleys, but the kid’s useless! The biggest problem with him is he doesn’t seem to learn. He was the big bad Slytherin then. Most kids kept out of his way – ‘cept Sensei. If he’s the same, just wondering what changed. ... And don’t say me! Aside from that being obvious, he’s not been a particular thorn in my side at all. And according to Sensei’s stories, Snape let him get away with anything. Now, he can’t even sneeze without losing points and getting detentions, from Snape! Even the older kids are saying that Snape’s docked more points from Malfoy and his friends this year so far than he had from that whole House last year. Aside from my life – our lives – what else is different?”

“The Club,” Hermione said after a moment’s thought. “Something like it came to be in Sensei’s stories called the D.A., but that was years from now and even then, there were no Slytherins in it at all. Sensei said his Hogwarts was at first four groups of students who only interacted when forced to: the four Houses. Later, it was two groups: Slytherins and everyone else. Here, one could say there are five groups: the Club, which has kids from all four Houses; and the non-Club members from the other four Houses who don’t really interact much outside of their Houses. The difference is, when we were sorted, there were more of us than any other single group. And now...”

“Even if the other four groups combined,” Harry began.

“Which they won’t,” Hermione added.

“We are more numerous. And we don’t tolerate the way things were, do we? That’s it then.”

“What is? That we are intolerant?”

“No, or yes maybe. In Sensei’s time, the divisions were accepted as normal. Slytherins hated Gryffindors and vice versa because that’s the way things had always been. Now, it’s different. Malfoy came here expecting the same society he had been told about, one where he was respected just because of his Dad. He lands in a Hogwarts where those attitudes are not tolerated and being the way he is and who he is does not let him do what he wants; it earns him a thrashing from everyone else. Probably’s been a bit of a shock for him.”

“You’re not thinking of helping him, are you Harry?”

“No way. Just not going to do any more than I already have. That little berk needs a serious attitude adjustment, a personality transplant, and a new family before I’d give him a chance. I was just wondering to myself why this place is so different than the one Sensei described.”

Any further musings about the differences between the two timelines had to be placed on hold as Clarice, Luna and Neville arrived.

“Guess we can get started,” Harry said. “While most of this is about the Founders stuff, Hermione? How’s the spell coming?”

“Er ... well enough,” Hermione said. “I mean, it’s not ready or anything, but I’m sure I can make it work. It’s just that...” she faded.

“Just what?”

“Honestly! I wish I had more time! I mean, we now have a date certain when it needs to be ready and deployed of November 9th. If I didn’t have to act like a student ... I mean there are still crafting details that need to be worked out before I can even begin to run tests. Then there’s the wand loading. That will take time too. I mean, I think I can have everything ready by then. I hope I can. To be honest, I’d much prefer a month or two with nothing better to do and no distractions and...”

“We’re cutting it close,” Luna agreed.

“All you need is time?” Clarice asked.

Hermione nodded.

“Any special space requirements? Would any room do?”

“We could do it all in here. We are doing it all in here, why?”

Clarice rolled her eyes. “There is a Time Chamber here at Hogwarts, remember? That place they send the pregnant girls to have their kids over a weekend? I’m sure we could ‘borrow’ it. They pass through seven months or so in three days or less. You’ve got all the time you need – within reason, of course.”

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Of course people might think you went there for other reasons,” Clarice teased.

“Considering no one remembers what went on when they were there, I seriously doubt that,” Harry said. “But we do need to make sure no one obliviates Hermione...”

“Or me,” Luna said.

“Or Luna. That wouldn’t be good.”

“It wouldn’t be medically necessary,” Clarice said. “Besides, I was talking with Poppy...”

“Poppy?” voices asked.

“Madam Pomfrey. She doesn’t do the memory charms. Aunt Minnie does.”

“Bet she loves that,” Harry said.

“Hates it, according to Madam Pomfrey.”

“Can you see how soon we could get it?” Hermione asked.

“What’s the rush?” Harry said.

“Well, if we could have it in the next week or two, even if just for a few nights or so, we’d be ready all the sooner. Just because Quirrell didn’t try anything until the Quidditch match in the other timeline, it does not mean he would not have taken an opportunity if presented. The sooner we’re ready for him, the better.”

“We still need to find out if he really is...” Harry started.

“We’ll know next week,” Clarice said. “Poppy’s scheduled him for a ‘routine’ examination.”

“Excellent,” Harry said. “Right then, Founders stuff. I’ll let Neville and Clarice handle this.”

“Why?” Hermione asked. “You’ve been helping, haven’t you? Harry James don’t tell me you haven’t been!”

“Hermione,” Clarice said, “he’s been busy ever since that Potions detention. Half the school is practically asking for tutorials and my brother can’t tell them no, can he?”

“Thanks,” Harry said. Hermione calmed down and smiled slightly.

“Right then,” Clarice said. “As you may know, Aunt Minnie has given us loads of stuff to go through regarding the Founders, anything about what it might mean to be a Founders’ Heir and anything at all about the Founders’ Tower. Well, for the most part, anything written after about 1400 is useless.”

“Why?” Hermione asked.

“We haven’t finished with all of the later stuff,” Neville answered. “There might be something. But so far, everything after about that time is so-and-so rewriting what such-and-such rewrote about what so-and-so copied from some Pureblood propaganda rants. None of it is new. All of it is at best slanted. And none of the idiots ever bothered with source material.”

“Not that before then is much better,” Clarice said. “A lot of the Chronicles before then can best be described as House Chronicles. Each House had its own version about the Founders and the early days of Hogwarts and, unfortunately, not a one of them could be called objective. The different House versions contradict each other frequently so there’s not much that truly is useful.”

“They are also their own form of propaganda,” Neville said. “Each collection of House Chronicles seems to have been written to proclaim why that House and its Founder were great and why the others were not. The earliest ones are probably the closest to the truth as they lack the vitriol that crept in as the decades passed.

“Even in the earliest ones, you’d wonder why there even is a Hogwarts. Slytherin is out for himself and so are all his students. They would throw their own mothers to a dragon to get ahead. Ravenclaw wanted smart students so she wouldn’t have to work hard at teaching them, if at all. They’re all lost in a world of books can cannot relate to any real person. Gryffindors only care about magic that can be used in duels, battle or dragon slaying. One of the most scathing rebukes of Gryffindor, written centuries after his death so it’s probably false, is that he used to throw kids into a pit with vicious dogs to see who was worthy of his House. The ones who lived became Gryffindors. The only Founder who looks good in the eyes of the other House Chroniclers is Huffelpuff. But even those are critical of her lack of any standards.”

“And,” Clarice said, “the earliest of these Chronicles is from around 1200. By then there was no one alive who had known the Founders. Basically, if you want to know what the Founders were really like based upon what is here at Hogwarts, you’re not going to.”

“Unless we haven’t found it yet,” Neville said.

“There is that possibility,” Clarice conceded.

“And what did these chronicles say about their own?” Hermione asked.

“You need to ask?” Clarice chuckled. “Their Founder was obviously the greatest of the lot and the others would be lost and useless without them. The earliest story of Slytherin leaving Hogwarts had nothing to do with Muggle Borns and everything to do with showing the others up – and succeeding, if the chronicle is to be believed, which I doubt. Slytherin was said to be the Judge and arbitrator. Without him, there could be no order. Gryffindor is the greatest knight and warrior of all time and could take on armies by himself. He single-handedly defended magical kind against the evils of the world. Ravenclaw invented most all magic known. Before then, magic was crude and undisciplined. Huffelpuff is the mother and teacher of all

wizard kind. Without her guidance, the magical world would have disintegrated.”

“Is there anything useful about the Founders in those things?” Hermione asked.

“What Sensei told us about their ancestors is bared out in the earliest ones,” Clarice said. “Not one of them could be considered a Pureblood. Ravenclaw and Gryffindor had magical ancestors, but they all seemed to have ‘married’ Muggles or Muggle Borns. Huffelpuff and Slytherin were the first known to have magic in their lines. Huffelpuff was probably the smartest of the lot, if any of this is true, because she had no education yet knew how to read, write and was equal to the others in magical ability and as the Founders had no true peers other than themselves, again if any of this is true, then that’s saying something. Gryffindor was born of a titled Nobleman of the Saxon Court who had married a witch. He was raised as both a Knight and a wizard. Ravenclaw was also born to a family that could see to her education, which was unusual in those days. Most women were never taught to read. Slytherin was apprenticed with a famed Potions Master, yet while he was adept with potions, his real talents lay in ‘the ancient magics,’ which are undefined.”

“Anything of the Founders’ Heirs?” Luna asked.

“The House Chronicles don’t say much,” Neville replied. “Just that they’re out there.”

“Most of the other works were after they would have been perverted by the Pureblood slant,” Clarice said.

“But there is this,” Neville said holding a small book. “It was written in 1326. It’s in Latin, but was translated some time ago. Most of it is useless, but it speaks of the Heirs. It says the Founders’ Magical Legacy is in ‘two parts.’ Each Founder left their magical heir a powerful magical object. And the Founders left their heirs even more to be shared between them.

“Gryffindor left his Heir the magic sword of his fathers to smite their common foes,” Neville read, “Hufflepuff to her Heir a garden where all that good can grow. Ravenclaw to her Heir a book from which all knowledge flows, and Slytherin to his, a mirror reflects secrets of all foes. I don’t think it rhymes in the original Latin.

“It also says that the four Heirs can inherit what one cannot,” Neville continued, “but doesn’t say what. It does say that if the Heirs unite and stake claim in their chambers in Hogwarts School or the Tower, they shall receive that which is theirs.”

“So the Tower and School are separate places?” Hermione asked.

“It doesn’t say,” Neville shrugged. “Nor does it say where their ‘chambers’ are.”

“Chamber of Secrets?” Hermione thought out loud.

“Possible,” Harry agreed. “But Sensei said it could only be accessed by a parselmouth and the Chamber seemed dedicated to one Founder only: Salazar Slytherin.”

“So, clues but we’re only marginally better off,” Hermione shrugged.

“And,” Clarice said, “there is this...” She got up and walked to a shelf retrieving a large book bound in animal hide. She placed it on the table before them. “It doesn’t have a title, per se,” she said, “but the first words are ‘On Heritage.’ It’s not about the Founders, at least so far as Neville and I have read. It’s about Hogwarts and a Legacy.”

“Sounds promising,” Harry said.

“It seems to be.”

“But?”



“It’s in Latin. Unlike the Chronicles which have later translations included in the binding, it does not. We’ve only managed to translate a small portion of it so far, Harry.”

“What have you got?”

Neville began to read:

I Tausig, having seen my one hundred and sixth this winter’s past, having served my Lords and Kings in peace and War, in plenty and in want, now find my world at an end. My lands are conquered. My farms plundered and towns set to fire by the Usurper. May he die the pain of ten thousand deaths before this vile year of 1066 shall fade!

What was to be glory fell to defeat. I with my King and comrades fell upon the Norse invaders at the bridge, broke their vaunted shield walls, set them to flight and slaughtered and plundered all, including their reviled King, the Invader Harold Hardrada. Then we set for the south to visit similar ruin upon the Usurper and his Armies.

We trapped them! Beset on two sides by swamp, one by sea and their only escape from drowning and starvation lay upon our swords and spears. But an ill wind blew. Dark Magics cursed our cause. Our King lay slain upon the field before thousands of his enemies who breathe no more. But we despaired. Many fled. Too many and those of us who held true were too few to restrain another charge.

I now despair for my land.

I now write so others might know of what could have been, but has been lost.

I write of the Four Clans, their Lairds and Ladies, their teachings and of those such as myself who became what we could be under their protection. I write, my children, of a dream lost. I write of the White Tower shining in the morning sun, rising above the Fair City upon the Hill. I write of Camelot rebuilt. Not the one of myth, but another which stood in my youth and promised so much. I write of a dream passed from the Masters to their Heirs and its fall when their Heirs fell into

dispute. I write of how the Dream can be again, but only if the Heirs will it as One. I write of that fair land in the far North. I write of the Land of Hogwarts.

“It’s a country?” Hermione asked in shock.

“It appears so,” Neville nodded.

“What else does it say?” Luna asked.

“We’ve only just started,” Clarice replied. “That’s as far as we’ve got.”

“Well, that helps,” Hermione huffed.

“It’s a start,” Harry said hopefully.

“There’s something else,” Clarice said. “Something odd.”

“Oh?” three voices replied.

She pushed the manuscript over to them. “Can you see the writing?”

“Of course,” Hermione said as if this was obvious. Harry and Luna nodded.

“It seems that since it was written,” Neville said mysteriously, “or at least since anyone tried, no one can see the writing. It’s from the Restricted Section and a note with the book believes it had something to do with the Founders and such, but there was a legend that only the Heirs could read it or cause it to be read.”

“Has Aunt Minnie...?”

“She sees something, but nothing that can be read,” Clarice replied. “Once we saw the note and that we could see words, we asked.”

“But she was an heir!”

“An heir,” Clarice said. “The note said Heirs. Neville and I think it can only be read if the Four Heirs either read it together or ‘cause it to be read.’ You three set this task.”

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20th, 1991 – APARTMENT 32A, DIAGON ALLEY, LONDON, U.K.

Luna “Jones” had moved to this flat only a few days before. The only advantage to the Leaky Cauldron was one did not have to cook. But the rooms were cramped for what she wanted to do and the place was full because of whatever was happening within the Wizengamot. Add to it her discomfiture with some of the fellow guests, older men who made their intentions towards the young women disturbingly clear, and she had moved on as soon as she could.

The apartment was small but comfortable. Aside from a kitchen and bath, it had but two rooms. The main living area was where she was now, seated at a desk she had purchased second hand in the Alley, looking at the piles of papers she had obtained over the last week. The papers were copies of the various magical papers. She focused on copying only the sections that dealt with current events or which she felt might contain articles relating to Harry Potter or anyone else identified in her voluminous notebook.

Luna was trying to piece together two things: what had changed from the history she knew and when had those changes began. She knew the fire in Surry was part of the changes. She also knew the story she had been told about her “cousin” was also a part of the change. The problem was when had those events taken place and where did they fit in the changed timeline? The fire had happened “about three years ago” she had been told by a resident of that neighborhood, but that could mean almost anything. Three years ago was September 1988. But the phrase might well mean later or even much earlier.

The easiest thing to do was ask someone. It was also the most dangerous. This was not her time. Engaging in any conversation risked someone figuring out she was not from this place or maybe even this time and risked questions that she was not willing to answer. In this time the magicals had strict laws regarding time travel, most of

which she violated just by showing up. Any time travel, however benign its intent, required loads of paperwork in advance and approval from the Ministry of Magic. She seriously doubted the current Ministry would believe such restrictions did not exist in the future. They did not, but that was because there was no Ministry when she had left; aside from her and “Father,” there was nothing at all. And using time magic to change the future was criminal misconduct – assuming you were caught of course. It was kind of hard to prove someone had changed a future that had yet to occur. But Luna had no intention of being subjected to any inquiry that would distract her from her mission.

She was posing as a foreign witch who was in London doing research for a book. As the book was not about magic, most people lost interest and let her be. Magicals in Britain were not interested in fiction or books about politics, recent history or such it seemed. The excuse got her into the magical Library and public archives and as she had been doing that now for a few days, she no longer had to worry about questions. It was too bad she still had to deal with the cheesy pick-up lines.

Luna had decided to work her way backwards from the day before she had arrived until whenever. An early event evidencing a change, she knew, was Harry going to the hospital. The problem was she had no idea when that happened and whether it made the papers. She knew the hospital was important and had confirmed it in her notes. In 1986, the Dursleys took Harry to a doctor for the first and only time her Father could remember. He needed to go to get his shots so that he could attend school. Father remembered it for two reasons. The first was that was when he got his glasses. The second was because his Uncle complained about the cost. That was odd. It was Britain and there was National Health Insurance. Why would there be a cost? Father also remembered cash was involved. Years later, he suspected his Uncle of bribing the Doctor and others to keep quiet about Harry’s condition. But other changes had occurred and probably would be in the papers even if the reporter did not know the real significance as far as Luna was concerned.

She had copied the sections of interest going back some six months over the last several days, although with her other necessary errands

such as buying a wardrobe, renting and furnishing her flat, setting up an account at Gringotts and a Muggle bank and other activities related to settling in for a long term, she had yet to do more than skim them for headlines of interest. She had also made a point to buy each day's copy of the Daily Prophet and several available issues of The Quibbler.

She started with the Daily Prophet from September 2nd. This was the one where on the "Society" page the list of students sorted at Hogwarts the day before appeared. Sure enough, there was Harry Potter sorted into Gryffindor. Luna pulled out her notebook to double check the other sortings. As she knew things had changed, she wanted to see to what level. She needed to know if there were any changes as small as sortings.

She started with Gryffindor. Her Father had listed each and every member of his year and their ultimate fate, but Luna knew what it was in almost every instance. Aside from her Father, they all died. Lavender Brown died shortly after the War in 1999. At the final battle, she had been attacked by a Werewolf. She took her own life less than a year later apparently because she could not bear what she had become. Seamus Finnegan had been murdered shortly after Voldemort's second return along with his family. Hermione Granger died when London was destroyed.

Clarice Jameson ... There was no Clarice in Gryffindor. Could she be the sister? And if she was, what was she doing at Hogwarts now? She was supposed to be a year younger than Father. Not only that, Father had never met the girl, not really. There was a Clarice a year behind at Hogwarts, but she looked nothing like the daughter of her Father's parents. There was also another witch named Clarice a year behind father who had gone to another school and died during the War. If this Clarice was the sister, this was a major change from the other timeline.

After Clarice, there was Neville Longbottom. He was Deputy Headmaster of Hogwarts when the school was destroyed in the later war. It was said his body was found with over thirty dead Death Eaters before him.

Luna Lovegood should not have been on this list either. She was supposed to be a year behind Harry and a Ravenclaw, not a Gryffindor. The older Luna noted that the children's ages were not included as they were all supposed to be eleven. But at least one and maybe two were not. Luna had left Britain on an expedition just before the last Voldemort War broke out and never returned. Father had hoped she might have survived for a time, but doubted she survived the final Armageddon. Her husband and two sons were murdered by Death Eaters.

So, the older Luna thought, there were now two girls in Gryffindor who not only were not supposed to be in this year, in the other time, they never were even in that House. Obviously and for some reason she did not understand, the changes had affected the composition of that House at Hogwarts. Just what have you done, Neville my Love, she thought. She looked at the rest of the list.

Parvati Patil was next. Father had described the girl as a beauty, but a little too into divination and gossip magazines. She was Lavender Brown's best friend and took her friend's suicide hard. She had been cursed as well during the Final Battle, although she seemed fine at the time. It would take over twenty years for the curse to claim her, but Father had said it was a blessing. Parvati never lived to see that the War she had fought in proved futile in the end.

In Father's time, Sally-Anne Perks never returned to Hogwarts for her Fifth Year. She was never close to any of her roommates, apparently. No one knew what happened to her, although given the times it was quite possible she had been killed. Dean Thomas died in battle just weeks before Voldemort's final defeat. Father never said what happened to the last name: Ron Weasley.

The other Houses were the same as they had been before. But the two additions to Gryffindor were a surprise, although she could not guess how that happened or what it meant. All Luna could think was that it had to be related to the change in the timeline. What it meant in the long run was anyone's guess.

She turned to read the later papers. There was a lengthy piece about the selection process for Minister for Magic and the Sequestration of

the Wizengamot. Apparently, this was a custom designed to force the usual lengthy debates to proceed swiftly as the members were all but imprisoned in London until the new Minister was selected. Dumbledore had apparently turned over his duties as Headmaster to his Deputy, at least until the new Minister was installed. This might seem like a good deal for young Harry, but Father had told her he only spoke with the man on two occasions the entire First Year: once during the Christmas Holidays and next after the incident with the possessed professor. While there was no doubt in Luna's mind that the old codger was trying to manipulate the boy, she also knew from Father that the old man rarely intervened directly. His being gone from Hogwarts may or may not be a good thing for this Harry Potter. Only time would tell.

She thought about it. She knew where Harry Potter was. One would think it would be easy to contact the boy and begin her true mission. The problem was, Luna had no idea where Hogwarts was. She knew it was far to the north in a place called Scotland, but nothing else. Hogwarts had been destroyed by the time she was born so she had never been there. She could write the boy a letter. She knew the magicals of this time used Owl Post and had passed the Post Office in Diagon Alley often enough. But post could be intercepted, and Father had said he was certain his Post had been intercepted either by Dumbledore or on his orders.

Besides, Luna thought, just what would I say to the lad? Hi! I'm from the future and I've been sent to help you. Like that would work. She needed more information. She needed to know where the boy lived when he was not at school. It would be far easier for her to make contact with him in person. It might even be easier for her to convince him she was being honest in person than through the mails.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20th, 1991 – POTTER HOUSE, LONDON, U.K.

It was a large gathering on Friday night to celebrate the combined birthdays of Hermione and Luna Lovegood. Hermione turned twelve the day before and Luna would turn eleven the next day. The problem was deciding who to invite. Ultimately, it was decided to pick family and those friends they could not see not inviting.

Hermione and Luna were to be the last to arrive as they were the guests of honor. The preparations were mostly the work of Rose Granger and Jasmine Lovegood, as the birthday girls were their daughters after all. The adults who would be attending arrive first for a dinner while the children had their dinner at Hogwarts, at least those children who were at Hogwarts.

The Lovegoods and Grangers sat down to dinner with the Longbottoms (Alice, Frank and Augusta), Amelia Bones, the Weasleys (Molly, Arthur and their youngest Ginny), the Blacks (Lord Black, Sirius, Sophie and little Emily), Remus Lupin and their friends from MI-5 which brought the Greengrass family and Harry and Clarice's Aunt, Uncle and seven of the eight Evans cousins.

Shortly after dinner, the crowd from Hogwarts began to arrive. Soon every first year Gryffindor was present along with First Years from all the other Houses. There were Hannah Abbott, Susan Bones and Ernie MacMillan from Hufflepuff; Terry Boot and Padma Patil from Ravenclaw and Daphne Greengrass, Millie Bulstrode and Theo Nott from Slytherin. The only upper years to be invited were the Weasley boys and Dora Tonks. Conspicuously absent was Minerva McGonagall, but as her relationship to Hermione was not yet common knowledge, those who did know understood why she was not there.

Most of the gifts were simple. The Grangers were less than thrilled with the amount of candy. Hermione did get several books, all works of Muggle literature which she liked. She also got a couple of collectable dolls to add to her quite extensive collection. Luna received a fair amount of kit for heading out on expeditions. Both girls appreciated their gifts quite enthusiastically.

Harry watched as his two friends opened their gifts and told the people how wonderful it was and such. He remembered Sensei's stories about how things were in the other time. Hermione never had a birthday at Hogwarts. Sensei never thought to ask, as he had never really had one at all before he turned seventeen. Birthdays were not really celebrated as a rule at the school back then, in that timeline. In the Club, they were. All Harry had to do was look at the smiles on



Luna and Hermione's faces, even if it was only for a card, to see how much this meant to them.

Harry was the last to give out gifts. To Luna, he gave her a camera. It was so that the burgeoning naturalist could take pictures of creatures unknown to science and had loads of lenses for such purpose. Luna was practically in tears.

To Hermione, his gift was far less practical. It was a ring. Not an engagement ring, but one he said he bought to remember their friendship. Hermione protested that it was too much, it was studded with real sapphires after all. But her protests did not stop her from placing her "friendship" ring or "girlfriend ring" on her finger, or from causing glares from her parents or cat calls from just about everyone else for the kiss she gave Harry in thanks. It was arguably the best birthday ever for both girls and Harry was pleased that they saw it so.

But now, Luna was eleven. She could now claim her legacy as a Founders' Heir. But they did not yet know how to go about claiming it or what it meant. They knew it might be important. They knew it might make a difference in some way. But they were at a loss as to how to proceed.

A/N: The individual legacies: The Sword is, of course, that of Gryffindor. The Garden is just a place that really lets things grow. (Neville should love that) The book is a spell book. There might be something useful in it, but it is a thousand years old. And the "mirror" is a really good foe glass. Of the gifts, the Mirror is probably the most useful...

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: MOVING FORWARD

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2nd, 1991 – HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

Harry, Hermione and Clarice waited in the Triple Eight Room for the Weasley boys to arrive. They had finally decided to use the room for a meeting with Sensei and what he had told them not two nights ago was disturbing. He went over the changes he had observed at Hogwarts since Harry had arrived and despite many of the changes, the primary timeline seemed intact. Harry had made the House Quidditch Team and the W.I.S.E. League Team as starting Seeker for both. As there were no rules against it in the House League, McGonagall had bought Harry a Nimbus 2000 model broomstick for him to use. That had happened just as before, including its arrival during breakfast and Malfoy's attempt to get Harry punished for receiving a broom. It was the first time anyone could remember having heard Malfoy speak since his stint in the Hospital Wing.

Just last week, Pomfrey had given Quirrell his "examination" and had secretly confirmed he was under active possession by a dark entity of some sort. This meant the main timeline remained intact for now and that there was still the real possibility that Quirrell would try and hex Harry and kill him during Gryffindor's first match with Slytherin on November 9th. Hermione and Clarice had received access to the Time Chamber Wednesday and Thursday night the previous week and again the past night to work on what they called "The Anti-Quirrell Spell". They would have preferred not to break up their time, but apparently the Chamber was needed for its intended purpose over the past weekend.

Sensei was confident that Harry and the others would be able to deal with Quirrell even if Hermione's spell research did not bear fruit. Of all the encounters the other Harry had with Voldemort in the other timeline, Quirrell was probably the easiest. The only difficulty lay in finding out about the Philosopher's Stone hidden at Hogwarts and, to a lesser extent, getting to it; two problems this timeline's Harry and friends had all but figured out already. Quirrell, however, was not much of a problem for the other Harry and given that the other Harry did not have any prior experience with magic before coming to

Hogwarts and was eleven in all respects, Harry in this time should make short work of the marginally competent Wizard as it was that Wizard whose magic and ability was truly manifest and would remain so for the “foreseeable” future.

Sensei’s concern was about another event further in the future. There was a Horcrux either in the possession of Lucius Malfoy or which would come into the man’s possession within the next several months; at least it had the last time. The last time, the man had managed to surreptitiously slip the Horcrux to young Ginny Weasley in Diagon Alley during her family’s shopping trip prior to the next school year. Sensei was not entirely certain of the man’s intent, even after interviewing the man about it some years later. Malfoy did know that the object was dark and most likely would possess the girl in some manner. He had learned that from the diary itself sometime in the next few months. His plot was to use the girl to unleash havoc at Hogwarts and a violent, anti-Muggle Born campaign which would, in the end, lead to her capture and the total discredit and disgrace of the Weasley family. Sensei did not know whether Malfoy knew the ulterior motives of his Lord’s soul fragment: to use the girl to return to corporeal form.

The problem was that the changes in this timeline might not lead to the Horcrux coming into the possession of the young Ginny. Malfoy had not spent any time in prison for his previous crimes prior to that in the last timeline and young Draco was not in his current state. Since the brat had returned from the Hospital Wing, things had changed for the lad. He seldom spoke to anyone and no one spoke to him. He ate alone and was alone the rest of the time as well as far as anyone could see. True, there were classes where students had to work with a partner or partners on their class assignment and Malfoy was not excluded from class assignments, but it was obvious his interactions even with other Slytherins were strictly limited to that and nothing else.

The Malfoys’ arrogance had led to the Horcrux being passed to young Ginny Weasley in the last timeline. The Malfoys’ hatred of Muggles and Muggle Borns had led to it. And Arthur Weasley’s position as one of the leading voices in Muggle Born rights and respect for Muggles had also been a major factor. Despite now being the Head of the Department of Magical Child Welfare, Arthur

remained a vocal advocate of Muggle Born equality. The problem was that the Malfoys' arrogance had taken a shot to the head with the incarceration of Malfoy Senior and the fall of Draco in the opening weeks of this year at Hogwarts. The Malfoys had to be "encouraged" to come up with their vile plan and set it in motion. Their ire had to be pointed at the Weasleys, and this is why Harry, Hermione and Clarice had gathered.

The four Weasley boys entered and were invited to sit. Harry was not too worried about the upcoming conversation. Ron had passed his Mind Magic O.W.L.s the past summer and the other three had an additional summer of training meaning all of them were safe from "tampering." Harry was fairly confident that the older three could not be compelled to reveal information against their will by just about any means known to magic, at least not here in Britain. Ron might be so compelled, but there were few who could do it and in any event, using those invasive arts on a "minor" was illegal.

"You wanted to see us Boss?" one of the Twins said.

Thank goodness he didn't say "General" or some such, Harry thought to himself. After last weekend, he half expected a snarky comment like that from the Twins.

When the Club returned from Japan this past summer it had 927 members. Last weekend, the Club officially expanded for the next year. It now had 1,914 members ranging in age from six years old to twenty. That required organization and structure that had not existed in the past. Each school's student Heads now had a "staff" of assistants and the Club had its own student staff. Harry was considered the overall "Head." He had not asked for the position, but he had been the only nominee.

His "staff" was loosely organized into several areas, with members from all the schools. Right now, excluding himself, there were twenty-two on "staff." There were eight subsections, each headed by a student with at least three summers in Japan behind them. Only Dora Tonks and Amber Evans, who each headed their schools Clubs, were not on the National Staff, as it was now known unofficially.

Trisha Powell headed the section known as “Member Affairs.” She was a St. George’s seventh year with three summers in Japan and was responsible for anything related to membership in the Club. This included tracking performance and problems as well as finding out about bloodlines, in the case of Muggle Born members who might have been adopted. Each school had a person who did the same thing at the school level, but it was the National Staff who handled the Juniors.

Hermione was head of the Section dealing with Club Security.

Harry and Clarice’s cousin Jason Evans from St. George’s headed Training. His section dealt with training at Camp W, the other weekly educational programs for the Juniors, coordinating continuing training and tutorials at all the schools to ensure uniformity, and he was also heavily involved with the W.I.S.E League. Jason was twenty years old and one of the oldest Club members. He was also now and Agent with Office W of MI-5, who felt the Club was an important part of its mission in regards to the internal magical security of the realm.

One of Jason’s best friends, who was also with Office W, had the hardest job of the lot, most thought. Ian Smith was in charge of Logistics, which made sure if the Schools or Camp W needed stuff, they got it. The real headache, however, was moving people. The W.I.S.E. League games would mean moving students and families all over the country. More critically, he and his people, and his counterparts at all the schools, needed to make sure the Muggle parents could get to and see the matches.

Justin Parker, also Jason’s friend and fellow MI-5 Office W colleague dealt with Summer Session issues. This meant making sure the Muggle Government and the Watanabe School would be able to handle the huge increase in students heading to Japan for the summer. It also meant he made sure that his School counterparts got the applications ready in plenty of time and that those attending University or Masters programs got their applications in early as well.

Susan Bones headed communications. Hogwarts School had its own communications section that sent and received messages to and from the other schools on their special communications parchments.

Susan was to make sure there were no breaks in such communications. She also made sure that the National Staff at Hogwarts saw what they were supposed to see as soon as possible.

Luna had run the Club Newsletter the past two years and would continue to do so. Should the Club “go public,” her father and the Quibbler would be their “press.” Her new assignment had to do with the Wizarding Wireless Network as her Dad and the father of another Club Member, who worked for WWN, were arranging live broadcasts of all the matches. Lee Jordan, a Hogwarts Third Year and Club Member had already been selected as “The Voice of Hogwarts,” and would provide commentary during the matches played at Hogwarts School.

All that left was Clarice. She was, for now, the lone Healer in the Club (as opposed to in an advisory position). But that was going to change after next summer. There would be at least twelve others with a Basic Healer Mastery by then. She was placed “in charge” of Health issues and training.

Harry and the others had organized things this way the past weekend. It seemed logical. Each School Club had a similar organization as well, with similar sections that communicated with each other and the National Staff – or at least they would be doing so soon. None of the kids knew that their organizational structure had a pre-existing counterpart in many other places in the world.

Harry looked at the Weasley boys. “We’ve got things to discuss,” he said. “You have to understand, what is said from now on is very sensitive. You can’t tell anyone outside of this room about it except McGonagall. And by anyone, that includes your parents or anyone else. Clear?”

The four boys nodded.

“Voldemort is not dead,” Harry began.

“But you killed him!” Ron protested. “Everyone knows that!”

“No one really knows exactly what happened that night, Ron,” Harry replied calmly. “The only people who were there were our parents,” he continued nodding to Clarice, “who were killed, Voldemort who disappeared, Clarice who was three months old and apparently in another room throughout the attack, and me. And I have no memory of it.”

“But, let’s assume he was physically killed. Three of you have your Defense Masteries. Surely one of you knows of a way for a real Dark Wizard, steeped in the vilest of magical arts and without a conscience or remorseful bone in his body, to find away to survive and one day come back even if his body is totally destroyed?”

After a pause, Percy spoke. “A horcrux?”

“Try six,” Harry said.

“SIX?” the three older Weasleys exclaimed.

“What’s that? A hor-what?” Ron asked.

Percy then spent several minutes explaining what a horcrux was.

“So,” Ron said, “if he has one of those things, you could kill him over and over again and he’ll just keep coming back?”

Harry nodded.

“And he has six? And they’re all hidden and protected by magic and stuff?”

“Actually,” Harry said, “he’s down to four. We found and destroyed two of them a couple of years ago.”

“How do you know this?” Percy asked.

“We can’t tell you,” Harry replied. “Not yet. Maybe not for a long time. But our source has not been wrong yet. We know he has those things

'cause we destroyed a couple. We also know he's trying to come back even as we speak and we have a plan to stop that attempt."

"But if you're stuck here how can you..." Ron began. "He's here in some form isn't he?"

Harry nodded. "And we will deal with it. That's not why we asked you here. We also know where two other horcruxes are and will deal with them as soon as we stop Voldemort, hopefully by Christmas, but we'll see."

"Those two others are here as well?"

Harry nodded. "And we don't need you four to deal with those, but once Voldemort is out of the way, you can help us if you like."

"So," Percy said, "if we're not hearing this to help stop ... V-V-Voldemort or to get those other two horcruxes, why are you telling us this?"

"We need your help with the fifth horcrux," Harry said. "In fact, without your help, it is doubtful we'll get a shot at that one anytime soon."

"If we can't help you with the Dark Wanker," one of the Twins said, "and you don't really need us for his two toys, why are we so important for this other one? You think we have it?"

"You think we know where it is?" the other asked.

"No," Harry replied. "However, we believe Lucius Malfoy either has it or will very shortly."

"And just why does this mean you need us?" Ron asked. "It's not like we'll ever get invited over to tea or anything. I mean, we'd love to help you, but how?"

"Here's the problem," Hermione said. "We know that he has it or will have it. We are as unlikely to be invited to tea, as Ron says, as you



lot. And, as brilliant and totally handsome as my boyfriend is, there's no way we can break into wherever it is and get it. First of all, while we think it's in the Malfoy home, we have no idea where that is. The place is probably warded like no one's business and, while Harry might well be able to drop those, it's not like the evil git would not know something was up.

"We could go to Madam Bones or even your Dad with this. No doubt the Ministry would have the place crawling with Aurors and the like within minutes. But we think the horcrux is too well hidden to turn up in a raid even if we knew exactly what it looks like."

"So taking it from them is out," Percy nodded. "You don't honestly expect him to hand it over, do you?"

"Actually," Harry smiled, "in a manner of speaking that's exactly what we expect him to do."

"And that's where you lot come in," Clarice added.

"How?" a few voices asked.

"We know the Malfoys don't like your family," Hermione began.

"That's an understatement," Percy huffed. "Hate is a better word."

Hermione nodded. "Lucius in particular. We know he hates your father's political stance on Muggles and Muggle Borns and he probably believes your father is the reason everyone knows he's really a bastard..."

"Slimy git didn't need Dad's help with that," Ron chuckled. "His being a Death Eater proves he's a right bastard."

"Not that kind of bastard, Ron," Hermione said. "Your Dad is head of Child Welfare. They've been telling some Muggle Borns they really are not Muggle Born since the office started. Malfoy probably believes that your Dad is somehow responsible for his family being disowned by Lord Black."

“Lord Black learned that Lucius is really his oldest grandson. Apparently, Lord Black’s son had an affair with the wife of Abraxas Malfoy and that affair led to the birth of Lucius. Since Lucius real dad never married his Mum, he’s a bastard – a child born out of wedlock. It’s not a position that is respected in traditional Pureblood circles.

“Anyway, we think Lucius is more than a little pissed about his true parentage becoming public and blames your father. But, given events, there’s nothing he could really do about it. Not directly, anyway. But, if he could somehow discredit your father and the rest of you in a way that you would never suspect his involvement...”

“Very Slytherin,” Percy said. “How?”

“What if an ‘unsuspecting’ child of Arthur Weasley were to somehow come into possession of the horcrux of Voldemort?” Harry answered. “Sooner or later, that would come out.”

“You think he’d do that?” Percy asked. “How?”

“You’re the prank expert,” Harry said. “But I think it could be done. Draco could get it and slip it into a book bag or something like that. We know enough about the object to know it seems innocent looking enough that the victim would not see the danger and simple enough they might not suspect something’s really amiss.”

“If that thing took possession of the victim, there’s no telling what would happen!” Percy said.

“Except that the child would be blamed for it,” Harry nodded, “and by extension your Dad. Unless...”

“We knew in advance,” Percy nodded. “We’d get the horcrux and destroy it and no one would be the wiser. How?”

“It seems his son is having a hard time here at Hogwarts,” Harry smiled. “Perhaps you lot could make it just a little harder. Not too

much, not enough to get into any real trouble yourselves, but just enough that the little prat whines to Daddy about the mean, nasty and gloating Weasley boys in his letters home every once in a while.”

“You sure you’re not a Slytherin in disguise?” one of the Twins asked.

Professor Pyth Vector taught Arithmancy at Hogwarts School. He had been teaching at the school since 1969 and would have been Head of Ravenclaw House, or at least he would have been offered the post, had Filius Flitwick not been teaching there a few years longer. He had finished Hogwarts with the highest Arithmancy N.E.W.T.s in the country in 1959 and had worked in magical research in the Department of Mysteries for ten years.

That department within the British Ministry for Magic had such a name for several reasons. For most of the wizarding world, including most of the rest of the Ministry, it was so named because it was a mystery what they did. For those who actually worked there, the joke was it was a mystery why they did. They studied magic in all of its details and theories. Why really was anyone’s guess because anything they learned remained secret from the rest of the world.

Professor Vector found that part of his job frustrating. Why involve yourself in research if no one will ever know what you did? He was not out for fame or fortune, but it made no sense to study something and learn about something unless you at least intended to either use that knowledge or pass it on to others who might be interested. When the position opened up at Hogwarts, he applied immediately and was accepted by Dumbledore within days of posting his application. As a teacher, he believed he could pass on what he had spent so much time studying. That was until he learned that the Ministry both considered everything he had done a State Secret that could not be revealed to anyone and so controlled the details of education that he felt limited in what he could teach. He could teach students what they needed to learn to pass their O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s and nothing more.

The good news was that in his field, that was a fair amount of information. An Outstanding N.E.W.T. in Arithmancy from Britain was

the same as an Outstanding anywhere else. This was not the case in other courses that by Ministry decree were not allowed to teach more than the absolute minimum required to attain "Acceptable" I.C.W. accreditation, which was less than the rest of Europe required and far less than many other countries. Because the course was comparable to the material taught anywhere else in the world, it attracted bright students whom he enjoyed teaching. It also attracted Muggle Borns. Most, because it was similar to maths they had been taught in the Muggle World. But at least a few had figured out by the end of Second Year (when they selected electives) that the employment opportunities for them in Britain were limited. When one considered that Defense and Potions fell far below the international level and, even with solid professors, many countries considered Charms and Transfiguration below standards, Arithmancy, Runes and Herbology were the courses one needed in Britain under British standards to get a decent job outside of Britain, unless one considered shopkeeper a decent job. Professor Vector had no problems with merchants as a trade. But he felt students should have greater choices.

Before the War, he was somewhat content. As a relatively new teacher, he was spending most of his time learning his craft and preparing his lessons. During the war, he began to note the problems, but kept silent. It was not a good time to complain about "the talent drain" of "the best and brightest" Muggle Borns fleeing overseas. People were of three minds then. They were leaving anyway and could care less. They were Pureblood Supremacists who would never miss the talent. Or, they were the rest who feared reprisals for even suggesting Muggle Borns had anything to offer the world.

Even after the War, speaking out publically was almost pointless. The Evil One had been defeated which proved that the country was on the right path. It was not broken, so why fix it? People were not being murdered left and right, so there was nothing to complain about. But in the Staffroom, Professor Vector was anything but silent on what he saw were fundamental flaws that if unchecked would make Britain a magical backwater if it was not one already. He knew that while there were some on staff who did not agree with him, there were others that did.

Professor Vector had inherited a fair amount of money from his parents following their deaths during the War. While it was never proven that they were victims of Death Eaters, their demise was classified as "Suspect." He had married a Muggle Born in 1974, one of his best students if truth be told and he believed his parents were victims of a reprisal. He and his wife lived in Hogsmeade where she had a workshop where she made things that she sold to the various shops in town. They had three children. Two were old enough to attend Hogwarts and the other would be next year. But not one would ever attend. He and his wife had sent them off to a magical school in North America when they were seven. They felt that if Britain would not change its educational policies, then their children should attend school under a more progressive system. They saw their children at Christmas and for three months during the summer.

He had been called into the Acting Headmistress's office that evening following dinner. He usually only ate lunch at the school, but had been there that evening working and decided to head to the Great Hall rather than go home and come back to grade papers. He had no idea why Minerva wanted to see him.

"Come in Pyth," McGonagall said almost as soon as he knocked. Professor Vector came in and had a seat.

"I hear you have exceptional Occlumency skills," McGonagall said.

Odd statement, Professor Vector thought. "It was a requirement in my last job," he said with a nod. He did not note any attempt at legilimency. "Is there a reason you mentioned that?"

McGonagall nodded. "You're position on the quality of education in this country is well known. You have even gone so far as to send your own children abroad to be educated rather than to see them suffer through what you consider substandard education."

What is this about? "My position on the topic, at least within the confines of the staffroom and my own home are hardly secret." Something odd was happening, he thought. McGonagall was never this cryptic about anything.

McGonagall nodded. "What do you know about the Club?"

Odd, he thought. "They have their own Quidditch League," he said. "They're the only group that truly crosses all House lines. They tend to have higher marks in classes than the average students. And they wear those badges or whatever they are on their collars. Or is there something more?"

"You know what's expected," McGonagall nodded, "and that's far from the truth. They have a need for your – er – expertise. However, before we discuss this any further, I want a Wizard's Oath that nothing we say or see from this point on will be revealed to anyone outside of this room."

His curiosity arguably overrode his sense of caution. He took the oath.

"I assume this Club is Dumbledore's idea," he said immediately afterward. The Headmaster was fond of oaths, or so he had been told.

"He knows nothing about it," McGonagall said. "Or at least no more than you do and that is the way it will remain..."

It took over a half an hour for McGonagall to give him an overview of the true Club. He was transfixed as she spoke and stunned by what she revealed. There were ninety-one students at Hogwarts who were years ahead of where they were in school, including many First Years. And the Club was not limited to Hogwarts. The total numbers were mind boggling. There were already almost a thousand kids throughout Britain who were being educated abroad and that number would double come next fall. The youth of magical Britain were doing on their own what he had wanted to do for ages! Had he known about this "Club," his children would not be in North America right now!

It was a still dumbfounded Professor Vector who followed McGonagall to what he thought was an abandoned part of the castle and through a secret door into a "Common Room" that put the one he remembered from Ravenclaw House to shame. It was huge. It was also well appointed. Along one wall were large windows overlooking

the castle and grounds. The other had a series of doors, between which were bookcases from floor to ceiling filled with books. Students from all four Houses were present. Some appeared to be studying or tutoring others and others just hanging out. A few of his students from class said their “Hellos” as he followed McGonagall through the long room.

At the far end were stairs and he followed her up to the next floor and down a corridor that seemed lined with classrooms until they reached a closed door with a sign upon that read “Triple 8.” McGonagall actually knocked before entering! She was Acting Headmistress and it seemed she was expected to knock? Professor Vector was flabbergasted.

Inside, he recognized Professors Sprout and Flitwick as well as the School Healer Madam Pomfrey. He also recognized the boy Harry Potter, but only because the lad had been pointed out to him by someone earlier in the term. There were five other children as young as the Boy-Who-Lived in the room as well as a Seventh Year prefect who he had in his N.E.W.T. class named Tonks. Professor Vector was introduced to the younger students as a former researcher and the current Arithmancy Professor.

“Professor?” McGonagall continued, “you of course know of Dora Tonks,” she added indicating his student.

“Of course,” he began.

“Perhaps not as much as you suppose,” McGonagall continued. “Dora is a Third Summer in the Club. She passed her N.E.W.T.s in the summer of 1989 while attending the Watanabe School of Magical Studies in Japan. She has also attained her Masteries in Defense, Charms and Transfiguration and is working towards a Mastery in Curse Breaking. She has completed her degree in Physics and is working towards her doctorate in that field.”

Professor Vector did not know what to say.

“Neville Longbottom,” McGonagall continued. “Like the other students other than Ms. Tonks, he’s a First Year here; but he’s completed three summers in Japan and has his Masteries in Defense and Potions. He’s nearly completed his work towards his Herbology Mastery and has his degree in Botany. And after that, Neville?”

“Mastery in Transfiguration,” Neville said. “Hopefully a PhD in Agronomy as well.”

“Luna Lovegood,” McGonagall said indicating the blonde haired girl with a dream like expression on her face. “Her degree is in Journalism. She holds Masteries in Defense and Magical Zoology and is working towards her Mastery in Spell Crafting. This is Susan Bones,” she said indicating the girl with red hair. “She has her degree in Physics and is working to her doctorate along the same lines. She has her Masteries in Defense and Magical Theory and is working towards her Wand Maker’s Mastery. Clarice Jameson,” McGonagall said waiving at a girl with very dark hair. “She complete four full summers, which means she’s technically done with her full time education. She has her PhD in Economics and Masteries in Defense, Charms and Basic Healing with Advanced Certifications in Obstetrics, Gynecology and Pediatrics. Harry Potter has his PhD in Chemistry and Masteries in Defense, Potions, Curse Breaking and Warding...”

“That explains what happened to Severus earlier this term,” Professor Vector noted. “Does Severus know?”

McGonagall shook her head. “And finally, my Great-granddaughter Hermione Granger. She has her doctorate in History and Masteries in Defense, Transfiguration and Spell Crafting. From the Club’s perspective, these are our oldest students.”

“Oldest?” Professor Vector asked.

“Time Compression,” McGonagall said. “Dora here is almost thirty. The others range from age twenty-three to about twenty-nine.”

“Bloody hell! And why am I here?”



“Peer review,” Harry said, “for lack of a better description. Hermione has crafted a spell and wants a second opinion.”

“I see.”

“This way,” Hermione said leading them to a door at the back of the room.

They entered a long, narrow passageway of sorts. Spaced at intervals along the passageway were a series of hoops. Professor Vector thought he recognized the set up.

“This is like what we had to test wands at the Department...,” he began.

“Of Mysteries,” Hermione finished. “Actually, I think this is a little more advanced. We can test not only the strength of a wand spell, but this can record the actual arithmancy of the spell itself in order to compare it with the predicted values. The readings will appear on the parchment,” she said indicating a parchment on a table next to a strange device that looked like a stand of some kind with a clamp at the top.

“How did you get this...?” Professor Vector began.

“I.C.W. Certified Spell Crafters can simply order these from approved manufacturers,” Hermione said. “There’s a company in the States that is particularly good and not too expensive. I mail ordered my set up this summer.”

“I have my own as well,” Luna added. “My faculty advisor approved the order for me.”

“My former colleagues might be less than pleased to see this set up,” Professor Vector observed. “But the Ministry has issues with anything of foreign origin.”

“Right then,” Hermione said in a business like fashion, “let’s get on with it. Luna? Please set the shield charm at the end of the firing range, maximum intensity.”

Luna nodded and began walking down the passageway to the far end.

“Shield charm?” Professor Vector asked.

“If this spell is working as advertised, it should pass right through the shield without any loss of intensity,” Hermione answered.

“But only Unforgivables...,” Professor Vector began.

“Wand?” Hermione asked.

“Which one?” Susan replied. “Burst fire or sustained?”

“Burst fire,” Hermione replied.

Susan handed Hermione a wand.

“Whose wand is that?” Professor Sprout asked.

“No one’s,” Susan replied. “It’s a chargeable wand. It’s one of the first techniques we are taught to master. Not very good as a personal wand, although it will work. The design is perfect for spell loading, however. Apple wood and pixie wing, takes a charge like no one’s business but it’s – er – temperamental for general use. This wand probably won’t choose any witch or wizard, as Ollivander would like to say. Easy to mass produce, though. I’ve made twenty or so since the school year began.”

“Spell loading?” Professor Vector asked. “You can spell load?”

“We all can,” Susan said. “Standard Defense Masters stuff. Now a personal wand is harder to load than these wands, but it’s the same technique. These wands are easy to load and can hold more charges, or more powerful ones.”

“We use chargeable wands to test complex and particularly difficult to cast spells,” Hermione added. “Such as the one we’ll be testing tonight,” she added again. She took the wand from Susan and then placed it securely in the clamp like device. The girl then began to manipulate some knobs on the device as she looked like she was aiming the wand down the corridor.

“Shields set,” Luna’s voice said.

Professor Vector noted that the blonde haired girl had returned. The brown haired one began handing out some kind of goggles to everyone and then put a set on of her own.

“Safety first,” she intoned.

Professor Vector nodded as he put on his set of goggles.

“Range clear?” the girl asked.

“Clear!” the other said.

“Firing!”

Professor Vector noted a jet of silver light shoot from the wand on the stand. Immediately, he noticed numbers and symbols beginning to appear on the parchment. It was arithmancy equations.

“Six percent power attenuation across the test range distance,” the Hermione girl said. “No appreciable drop at the shield. It passed right through as predicted.”

Professor Vector whistled. “That means the effective range is seven times the test distance?”

“So it appears,” Hermione said.

“What’s the distance?” Harry asked.

“Thirty meters.”

“A spell with an effective range of over two hundred meters?” Professor Vector gasped. “What do you need a spell like that for?”

“Even if a spell can hit and affect a target at that range,” Neville nodded, “aiming accurately at more than about ten or fifteen meters is a problem. Volley fire, I guess. That would make up for individual inaccuracies if enough wands were employed.”

“Gun sights?” The older girl suggested.

“We would need a set-up like a rifle,” Harry offered. “Even a pistol is inaccurate at that range even if the round is still lethal. Probably something like a scoped rifle.”

“The Twins could probably fabricate something,” the other boy suggested. “Still, that’s only if we have the need to really reach out and touch somebody.”

“And,” Hermione added, “it’s not as if you can just cast this spell. It would only be reliable from a pre-charged wand. How many burst rounds?” she said turning to the red-haired girl.

“Depends upon the size of the core,” she replied. “This one,” she said indicating the wand in the stand, “is a fifteen charge wand for your average spells. But this spell is way more complicated so this wand can only handle five charges. I could make ones that could hold three times that in burst mode.”

“But what does this spell do?” Professor Vector added. He noted no more figures were appearing on the parchment and that the girl named Hermione was looking over the figures. He vaguely understood what they were talking about and all he knew is that it sounded ominous in some way.

“It worked,” she said handing the parchment to Professor Vector. “Now let’s see what our ‘independent reviewer’ thinks.”

From his work as a consultant with his old employer during the War, he recognized the formula immediately. Who were these kids? "This is the Cruciatus Curse! But that's impossible! It had a range of at best twenty meters! Why? Why would you need such a spell? Who the hell are you people?"

"Look again, Professor," Hermione said.

After several seconds he did. It indeed looked like the arithmancy for the infamous Torture Curse, one whose mere use could land the caster in Azkaban if it was used on a human. Then he noticed something. His eyes widened.

"The values are all wrong," he said. Then he gasped. "They're opposites! It's identical and yet the exact opposite?"

"That's the idea," the Hermione girl replied somewhat smugly. "This is the exact opposite in every detail. It is to the Crutiatus Curse as white is to black, light is to dark..."

"Love is to hate," Professor whistled. "A love based spell? Like a Patronus Charm?"

"Patronus Charms only require a happy emotion," Hermione replied. "Of course, if that happy emotion is based off of a memory of love, it is far more powerful and easier to cast. But this is based on love in the first instance. Far more powerful stuff, and wicked hard to pull off under threat.

"This spell requires the caster to feel love just to cast it. Love powers the spell. It also requires the caster to feel love for the target to work. Kind of hard to do if the target is a threat. In that way it is the opposite of the Crutiatus. That requires hate to cast and hatred towards the intended victim. Arguably, it is easy to hate and feel hate than love in some circumstances."

“The caster also needs to intend the result,” Professor Vector said. “More than intent really, more like desire, need, even lust for the result.”

“Similar here,” Hermione nodded. “The intent, not the result.”

“Oh?”

“What is the result of the Crutiatius?”

“Pain. Excruciating pain,” Professor Vector replied.

“And what is the polar opposite to excruciating pain?”

He shrugged. “Joy? Pleasure?”

“Ecstasy?” Harry added.

“Well, one of those to be sure,” Hermione said. “At least that’s the theory. We won’t know ‘til we try it out on someone. Anyone want to take a hit for the team?”

“You’re not seriously suggesting someone act as a victim for this new spell just to verify its effects, are you?” Professor Vector asked in shock.

“It’s not lethal,” Hermione replied. It was clear that was exactly what she was suggesting.

“I’ll do it,” the Longbottom boy said as if he was being asked to go get a book or something.

“For all you know,” Professor Vector said, “this spell, while it appears to be the opposite of the Cruciatus, might well have an almost identical effect!”

Longbottom shrugged. “Been there, done that, got the T-shirt.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means he’s been under the Crutiatius spell before,” Hermione said. “We all have.”

“What?!”

“Standard Defense education,” Hermione went on. “The Imperious Curse and Crutiatius affect the mind and not the body. It’s not unlike active legilimency or a hyper-charged compulsion charm. We all get placed under the Imperious before we sit our O.W.L.s so we know and can describe the effects accurately. For N.E.W.T.s, we learn to resist if not throw off that curse. We experience the Crutiatius in N.E.W.T. class and also learn techniques that can at least lessen its effectiveness so we are not totally incapacitated. After five years of intensive Occlumency training it’s not that difficult to learn techniques against those spells.”

“And you can block the Killing Curse as well?” Professor asked sarcastically.

“No. They don’t throw that one around, even in a controlled setting. We studied martial arts, though.”

“So?”

“It means we developed the agility to dodge,” Neville said. “Let’s get on with this, shall we?” he said walking off down the range.

“What is this spell for?” Professor Vector asked insistently.

“If it works,” Hermione replied, “it should incapacitate and aggressor.”

“Why do you need this spell?”

“That information is classified for now,” Harry said coolly.

Professor Vector looked at the boy and then McGonagall.

“There is a need, Pyth,” she said in a very serious tone. “This is not some prank.”

He was thinking of a reply when he heard a voice call out. “Ready!”

“Range clear?” Hermione asked.

“Aside from Neville,” Luna replied.

“FIRING!”

Professor Vector saw the silver light shoot out again and hit the boy down range. The boy fell over.

“DID YOU EXPECT THAT?” he said to Hermione.

She shrugged. “It was a possibility. There's a cushioning charm on the floor just in case. Let's get him checked out.”

How could these people be so cold, he thought as he saw Pomfrey and the girl he was told was a Healer head down the passageway towards the fallen boy.

A half an hour later, they were back in the room where he had been introduced to these Club Members. There was nothing physically wrong with the boy Neville, aside from the fact he was not moving or responding to anything. Pomfrey was sure he could hear, that he was conscious and that if he chose to open his eyes, he could see. She was also sure that for some reason, the boy did not want to. He lay on the couch with a disturbingly content expression on his face.

“This is ridiculous,” Professor Vector said.

“It is consistent with the modeling,” Hermione said. “The opposite of pain is painlessness. Bliss. Ecstasy. The effect should wear off.”

“When? You don't know, do you?”



“We will when it does,” Madam Pomfrey said.

“I can’t believe you people! You test an unknown spell on a person? At the Ministry, we only used animals and...” his voice trailed off.

“Prisoners,” McGonagall added.

“What?” several voices said.

“There were rumors,” she continued. “If their animal testing was inconclusive, they’d test their spells on prisoners.”

“That’s outrageous,” Hermione scolded. “Prisoners?”

“And you tested yours on a boy who did not deserve this,” Professor Vector shot back. The truth was they had tested spells on prisoners from time to time and it had sickened him. It was one of many reasons why he left.

“And they did? Neville knew the risks and volunteered! He did not do this to get a lesser sentence or a better cell or something. He knew the risks and did this so we would all know the results! That’s a lot different than forcing someone to do this or coercing them!”

“But...”

“But nothing,” a new voice said. They looked and Neville was looking at them. The smile was gone. “She’s right. I knew the risks and accepted them because it was necessary that someone did, not because I would gain anything for it or had no better choice.”

“How do you feel,” Madam Pomfrey asked.

“Normal enough,” Neville replied, although he did not sound pleased.

“What happened?”

“For a while, I felt perfect. I felt great! It’s hard to describe how good I felt. I didn’t want it to end.”

“Did you try to fight it off?” Hermione asked.

“Didn’t even bother,” he replied.

“Why not?”

“It’s not like the others. Not at all like the Unforgivables. I was not being asked to do something against my will. I wasn’t being asked to do anything at all, so why bother? There was no pain. I could not have felt better ever, so why would I need to stop it? I also knew I was in no danger, so again why stop something that felt so good?”

“Were you aware of what was going on?”

“Pretty much,” Neville replied. “I heard you guys. I just didn’t care, really. Reality was nothing to be concerned about.”

“You couldn’t resist?”

Neville shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe. I just didn’t want to even think about resisting it. It felt like ... wow!”

“And now?”

“You have any idea how depressing normal is? I’ll be okay.”

“Be that as it may, Mr. Longbottom,” Madam Pomfrey said, “I’ll want you overnight in the Hospital Wing overnight in case there are any unforeseen complications or side effects.”

“Now I really am depressed,” Neville sighed. But he stood up and followed the Healer from the room. Before he left, he stopped.

“You know those Muggle things called drugs?” he asked rhetorically. “I guess that spell could put the dealers out of business. See you guys at breakfast.”

“Let’s just hope he doesn’t want to get hit again,” Harry said grimly. “Hate to think what might happen if that spell proved to be addictive.”

“We’ll lock the loaded wands,” Hermione nodded.

“Is that the effect you were after?” Professor Vector asked.

“Close,” Hermione said. “Probably is. There is only one ... no, now that I think about it two ways to be sure.”

“And those are?”

“One is classified,” Harry said seriously.

“And I don’t think anyone will give us a dementor to play with,” Hermione added. “I would not be at all surprised if this spell would seriously damage or destroy those things.”

“So that’s what it’s for? Harming dementors?” Professor Vector asked.

“Among other things,” Hermione replied. “And the other things are not up for discussion at this time,” she added as if the conversation was over.

“Now listen here,” Professor Vector began.

“Pyth, please?” McGonagall said.

“What? These are kids and they’re playing at goodness knows what!”

“They only look like children,” McGonagall said. “I know it can be hard, but they are not children. Legally, all of them are adults and

should be treated as such. Hermione is almost twenty-nine. Now, what are your conclusions?”

“I can’t speak to the difficulty in casting,” he replied calming down. “The arithmancy supports her conclusion that it would be very difficult to do except under almost ideal circumstances. Given its effects and the fact that it can penetrate a shield charm with no loss in power, or practically no loss, my guess is this is intended as some form of non-lethal, incapacitating combat magic. Its effective range has potential, but your students have pointed out the flaws. Aiming a wand at a human sized target more than fifteen meters away is dodgy, even if the spell can hit it full force. Given that and the difficulty in casting, I’d question its practicality and therefore it’s utility.”

“And their notion of wand loading?”

“That gets around the casting problems, not the accuracy or utility problems. If you load any wand, it cannot be used for anything else until the pre-loaded spell or spells are completely discharged. Effectively, all you would have is this one spell. Not practical if you need to defend or need any other spell. You’d need two wands: one for general use and another just for this spell. That’s not ideal or practical.”

“If we could solve the long range stuff,” Harry said, “then it would be useful. Use this spell against opponents before their wands are close enough to engage, then switch to a close combat wand.”

“That would work,” Professor Vector mused. “Wait! Why are we even concerned about this? Ten years ago, this might have been useful as there was a war, but in peace?”

“To assume peace is a sustainable condition without a change in the hearts of men is to invite disaster,” Luna said. “Plato said that only the dead have seen an end to war.”

“In peace, prepare for war,” Harry nodded.

What the bloody hell is going on here and why did I ever agree to take that damned Wizard's Oath? Professor Vector thought to himself.

McGonagall seemed to sense the man's dilemma. "It will all make sense in time, Pyth."

"Probably sooner than you think," Harry added.

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